This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

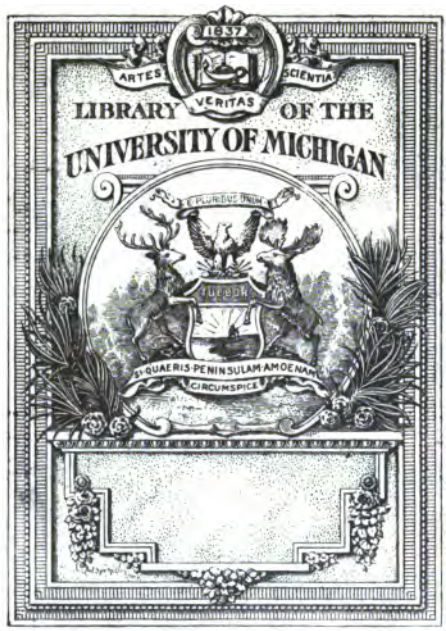
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`



THE GIFT OF
Rev. A. W. Wilson

BX
8340
.N38

A HISTORY

OF THE

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

OF THE

GOVERNING CONFERENCE

IN METHODISM,

AND ESPECIALLY OF THE

GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

BY

REV. THOMAS B. NEELY, D.D., Ph.D., LL.D.,

AUTHOR OF

"The Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism;" "Parliamentary Practice;" "Young Workers in the Church;" "The Church Lyceum," Etc.

CINCINNATI: CRANSTON & CURTS.
NEW YORK: HUNT & EATON.

Copyright

BY CRANSTON & STOWE,

1892.

TO

The Memory of my Beloved Father,

MR. THOMAS NEELY,

from whom I first learned the principles of

METHODIST POLITY,

whose upright character and useful life as a citizen
and as an official in the Church
caused him, when living,
to be highly respected, and since his death to be
lovingly remembered by all who knew him,

THIS BOOK IS

Affectionately Dedicated.

PREFACE.

THE reason for many peculiarities in ecclesiastical economy must be sought in the circumstances connected with their crystallization and incorporation. A knowledge of their history is absolutely necessary if we would understand their intention; for, in many instances, an unhistorical interpretation of the language of a law will give it a false meaning.

The time has arrived for a re-study of the fundamental principles of the ecclesiastical polity of Methodism. The early generations have passed away; and the records of facts connected with the ecclesiastical beginnings are scattered in many books, manuscripts, fugitive productions, and fragmentary utterances. These should be collated, and logically arranged.

In a former book, entitled "The Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism,"* we gave a study of the Methodist Episcopate, and of the initiation and development of organic Methodism. In the present work we trace the Conference idea from the first Conference, held by the Rev. John Wesley

* Published by Hunt & Eaton, New York, 1888.

285334

in 1744, down to the Conferences of the present time. We study the English Conferences down to the period immediately following Mr. Wesley's death in 1791; and then, starting with the beginning of American Methodism, we show the growth of the Conference idea until it develops into the delegated General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church; and, finally, point out the various changes that have been made in the constitution of the General Conference down to 1888.

The General Conference of to-day is an evolution from a crude beginning. To trace its development is to reveal the fundamental principles of the polity and general history of Methodism. The study is of vast importance, and should be of great interest to every member, as well as every minister.

Trusting that this contribution to the study of the history and constitutional law of the Church may be of service in the solution of historical and constitutional questions, this book is now submitted to the public.

T. B. NEELY.

PHILADELPHIA, PA., March 23, 1892.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

WESLEY'S CONFERENCES, ... 1

CHAPTER II.

WESLEY'S EARLY PLANS FOR PERPETUATING BRITISH METHODISM, AND ENDOWING THE CONFERENCE WITH POWER, . 20

CHAPTER III.

WESLEY'S FINAL PLAN FOR PERPETUATING AND EMPOWERING THE CONFERENCE, ... 44

CHAPTER IV.

THE EARLY AMERICAN CONFERENCES DOWN TO 1777, ... 82

CHAPTER V.

THE AMERICAN CONFERENCES FROM 1778 TO 1781, ... 127

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONFERENCE IN AMERICA FROM 1782 TO 1784, ... 184

CHAPTER VII.

WESLEY'S PLAN FOR THE REORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN METHODISM, ... 224

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ORGANIZING CONFERENCE OF 1784, ... 236

CHAPTER IX.

PAGE.
THE CONFERENCES FROM 1785 TO 1789, ... 267

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNCIL, ... 299

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUADRENNIAL GENERAL CONFERENCE, ... 318

CHAPTER XII.

THE DELEGATED GENERAL CONFERENCE, ... 338

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NATURE AND POWER OF THE DELEGATED GENERAL CONFERENCE, ... 374

CHAPTER XIV.

CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE FROM 1812 TO 1856, ... 389

CHAPTER XV.

CHANGES IN THE CHAPTER ON THE GENERAL CONFERENCE FROM 1856 TO 1868, ... 413

CHAPTER XVI.

CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION FROM 1868 TO 1888, ... 421

APPENDIX.

CONDENSED CHANGES IN SECTION ON GENERAL CONFERENCE FROM 1892 TO 1888, ... 447

THE GOVERNING CONFERENCE

IN

METHODISM.

CHAPTER I.

WESLEY'S CONFERENCES.

LORD MACAULAY declared that John Wesley's "genius for government was not inferior to that of Richelieu," and time shows the statement was not too strong.

His talent for organization manifested itself at an early date. His executive force was felt in connection with the Holy Club at Oxford University and in all the movements of the Oxford Methodists. In his early ministry in Georgia his ability to govern was rather intense. Some, indeed, might term it excessive; but it is to be remembered that at that period he was a High-Churchman, with much to unlearn as well as learn.

He was prominent in the formation of the first Moravian Society founded at Fetter Lane, London, May 1, 1738.[1] His impulse to direct manifested itself the same year—1738—in a set of rules which he drew

[1] Tyerman's Life of John Wesley, Vol. I, p. 282.

up for the regulation of the Moravian Band Societies.[1] The natural bent of the Rev. John Wesley toward organization appeared in a very marked manner while he was associated with the Moravians. On Monday, the 12th of November, 1739, Mr. Wesley left London to return to Bristol. In the evening he reached Wycombe, where there was a little society, and where he preached. He writes:

"Here we unexpectedly found Mr. Robson and Gambold, with whom, after much prayer and consultation, we agreed: 1. To meet yearly at *London*, if God permit, on the eve of Ascension-day. 2. To fix then the business to be done the ensuing year—where, when, and by whom. 3. To meet quarterly there, as many as can; namely, on the second Tuesday in July, October, and January. 4. To send a monthly account to one another of what God hath done in each of our stations. 5. To inquire whether Mr. Hall, Sympson, Rogers, Ingham, Hutchins, Kinchin, Stonehouse, Cennick, Oxlee, and Brown will join us herein. 6. To consider whether there be any others of our spiritual friends who are able and willing so to do."[2]

This was the first foreshadowing of the Conference idea, with its annual sessions, the quarterly meeting, and the monthly review of the work. It was a bold scheme of systematic and far-reaching activity.

As Dr. Whitehead, in his "Life of John Wesley," observes:

"Here we have the first outlines of a plan to unite the ministers together, and to extend their labors to different parts of the kingdom, under such regulations as might give

[1] Rules of Band Societies, 4th Ed., 1744. Luke Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. I, p. 210.

[2] Whitehead's Life of Wesley, Vol. II. p. 126. Dublin: John Jones. 1806.

them a mutual dependence on one another. In this sketch no one assumes an authority over the rest of his brethren—all appear equal. But this plan was never put into execution. When Mr. Wesley separated from the Moravian brethren, Mr. Gambold and some others gradually withdrew themselves from him."[1]

The scheme, in this particular form, was never carried out; for only a few weeks afterwards he withdrew from the Moravians on account of their heresies and religious extravagances. Numbers who had belonged to these societies also withdrew, and these, with others, repaired to Mr. Wesley; and in the latter part of the year 1739 he formed in London the first Methodist society.[2]

Thus, at the age of thirty-six, he was thrust out as the leader of an independent movement, and his status was changed. Before he was one among equals; now he was recognized as the chief, whose will was law. Society after society was formed, and by his genius cemented into "The United Societies."

He attracted regular clergymen to his assistance, and also raised up a lay ministry. In a few years his preachers had increased to such numbers that Mr. Wesley deemed it wise to invite them to meet him in Conference, and his first "Yearly Conference" began on the 25th of June, 1744. From that time until his death, on the 2d of March, 1791, he held "Conferences" annually, making forty-seven in all.

The most of the ministers who met Mr. Wesley on these occasions were lay preachers, but some of

[1] Whitehead's Life of John Wesley, Vol. II, pp. 126, 127, Dublin Ed.
[2] Tyerman, Life of Wesley, Vol. I, p. 282.

them were regularly ordained clergymen of the Church of England.

No one had any inherent right to attend these Conferences, as they were composed, not of all the preachers, but only of those Mr. Wesley "invited to confer" with him. They met him, not by natural or acquired right, but by permission. "Mr. Wesley at first invited all the assistants[1] to meet him, but afterwards only a select number; and he gave the name Conference, not to what was said, but to the persons assembled."[2] On March 3, 1785, Mr. Wesley gave a condensed history of the origin and development of the Conference idea in these words:

"In June, 1744, I desired my brother and a few clergymen to meet me in London, to consider how we should proceed to save our own souls and those that heard us. After some time, I invited the lay preachers that were in the house to meet with us. We conferred together for several days, and were much comforted and strengthened thereby.

"The next year I not only invited most of the traveling preachers, but several others to confer with me in Bristol. And from that time for some years, though I invited only a part of the traveling preachers, yet I permitted any that desired it to be present, not apprehending any ill consequences therefrom.

"But two ill consequences soon appearedone, that the expense was too great to be borne; the other, that many of our people were scattered while they were left without a shepherd. I therefore determined: (1) That, for the time to come, none should be present but those whom I invited;

[1] An assistant was defined in the Large Minutes of 1770 as "that preacher in each circuit who is appointed from time to time to take charge of the societies and the other preachers therein." He was the superintendent, so to speak, of the preachers and preaching-places on the circuit.

[2] Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., p. 446.

and (2) that I would only invite a select number out of every circuit.

"This I did for many years, and all that time the term *Conference* meant not so much the conversation we had together as the persons that conferred; namely, those whom I invited to confer with me from time to time. So that all this time it depended on me alone, not only what persons should constitute the Conference, but whether there should be any Conference at all—this lay wholly in my own breast—neither the preachers nor the people having any part or lot in the matter."[1]

The first Conference began on Monday, June 25, 1744, and continued the five following days, and was held in the Foundry, London. It consisted of the Rev. John Wesley; Rev. Charles Wesley; Rev. John Hodges, rector of Wenro; Rev. Henry Piers, vicar of Bexley; Rev. Samuel Taylor, vicar of Quinton; and Rev. John Meriton, of the Isle of Man; all of whom had been regularly ordained in the State Church.[2] There were also four lay preachers; namely, Thomas Richards, Thomas Maxfield, John Bennet, and John Downes.[3]

The day before the Conference commenced, besides the ordinary preaching services, a love-feast was held, at which six ordained ministers were present, and the sacrament was administered to the whole of the London society, now numbering between two and three thousand members, and at this grand sacra-

---

[1] "Thoughts upon Some Late Occurrences," Wesley's Works, Vol. VII, p. 309, Amer. Ed.

[2] Wesley's Works—Conversation I, Vol. V, p. 194, Amer. Ed.

[3] Smith's History of Methodism, Vol. I, p. 227; William Myles, Chronological History of the Methodists, London, 1803, 3d Ed., p. 22.

mental service, five regularly ordained clerygmen of the Established Church assisted.[1]

The Conference was opened with solemn prayer, a sermon by Charles Wesley, and the baptism of an adult, who, it is recorded, there and then found peace with God.[2]

Not pausing to dwell upon the fact that even at that early day the Methodists received the sacraments outside the consecrated Churches of the Establishment, we proceed to notice the Conference itself. The Rev. William Myles, one of Wesley's preachers, and an intimate friend of the founder of Methodism, tells us: "The subjects of their deliberations were proposed in the form of questions, which were amply discussed, and, with the answers, written down and afterward printed under the title of 'Minutes of Several Conversations Between the Reverend Mr. Wesley and Others,' but now commonly called 'The Minutes of the Conference.'"[3]

Mr. Wesley opened the proceedings of his first Conference with the following introduction:

"It is desired that all things be considered as in the immediate presence of God; that we meet with a single eye, and as little children, who have everything to learn; that every point which is proposed may be examined to the foundation; that every person may speak freely whatever is in his heart; and that every question which may arise should be thoroughly debated and settled.

"*Q.* Need we be fearful of doing this? What are we

[1] Tyerman's Life of Wesley, Vol. I, p. 443.

[2] Charles Wesley's Journal, Vol. I, p. 367.

[3] William Myles, Chronological History of the People called Methodists, London, 3d Ed., 1803, p. 23.

afraid of? Of overturning our first principles? *A.* If they are false, the sooner they are overturned the better. If they are true, they will bear the strictest examination. Let us all pray for a willingness to receive light, to know of every doctrine whether it be of God.

"*Q.* How may the time of the Conference be made more eminently a time of watching unto prayer. *A.* 1. While we are conversing, let us have an especial care to set God always before us. 2. In the intermediate hours let us visit none but the sick, and spend all the time that remains in retirement. 3. Let us therein give ourselves to prayer for one another, and for a blessing upon our labor.

"*Q.* How far does each of us agree to submit to the judgment of the majority? *A.* In speculative things, each can only submit so far as his judgment shall be convinced. In every practical point, each will submit so far as he can without wounding his conscience.

"*Q.* Can a Christian submit any farther than this to any man, or number of men upon earth? *A.* It is undeniably certain he can not; either to *Bishop, Convocation,* or *General Council.* And this is that grand principle of private judgment on which all the reformers proceeded, 'Every man must judge for himself; because every man must give an account of himself to God.'"[1]

The principles Wesley thus proposed to his first Conference, composed of six regularly ordained clergymen and four traveling lay preachers, were extremely liberal and courageous. They were foundation principles, not only of that Conference, but of genuine Methodism. They proclaimed the duty of a free, fearless, and full investigation, which would lead to the truth, even if error must be eliminated from former views; and they also maintained the right of private judgment even against combined or concentrated authority, while the suggestions as to practical

[1] Myles, Hist. of Methodism, 1803, 3d Ed., pp. 23, 24.

conduct during the session might be practiced to advantage by other religious bodies.

With Wesley's recommendation, "that every question proposed may be fully debated and 'bolted to the bran,'"[1] the Conference proceeded to discuss three points, namely: "1. What to teach? 2. How to teach? 3. What to do? that is, how to regulate doctrine, discipline, and practice."[2]

These inquiries covered doctrine, discipline, and general economy, including methods of teaching and modes of executing discipline. Under these general heads many questions were propounded and answers formulated, so that the Minutes of the Conferences appeared in the form of question and answer. In this way, in the course of years, the discipline of Methodism was gradually developed from the simple elements that existed at the beginning.

That questions of discipline must have occupied much of Wesley's attention at this time is evident from a note which he makes in his Journal shortly after the adjournment of this Conference. He says:

"The next week we endeavored to purge the society of all that did not walk according to the gospel. By this means we reduced the number of members to less than nineteen hundred. But number is an inconsiderable circumstance. May God increase them in faith and love!"[3]

In course of time, the order of business in the Conference became more regular, as well as more

[1] Minutes, 1744, Vol. I, p. 22; Peirce's Polity of Wesleyan Methodists, London, 1873, 3d Ed., p. 446.

[2] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VI, p. 194, Minutes of Conversation 1; Myles, History, p. 24.

[3] Wesley's Journal, Wks., Vol. III, p. 317, Amer. Ed.

elaborate, so that "The Large Minutes" give us the following form:

"Q. 52. What is the method wherein we usually proceed in our Conferences?

"A. We inquire, 1. What preachers are admitted? Who remain on trial? Who are admitted on trial? Who desist from traveling? 2. Are there any objections to any of the preachers, who are named one by one? 3. How are the preachers stationed this year? 4. What numbers are in the Society? 5. What is the Kingswood collection? 6. What boys are received this year? 7. What girls are assisted? 8. What is contributed for the contingent expenses? 9. How was this expended? 10. What is contributed toward the fund for superannuated and supernumerary preachers? 11. What demands are there upon it? 12. How many preachers' wives are to be provided for? By what societies? 13. Where and when may our next Conference begin?"[1]

It is easily seen how these questions would at that day draw out every point connected with the condition of the Methodist Societies, as they touched the ministry, the membership, the benevolences, and the cause of education; and it is manifest that this interrogatory order of business was the basis of the order which is still used in the conduct of the Conference work in the United States, as well as in British Methodism.

Mr. Wesley encouraged those who were members of the Conferences to express their judgment with the greatest freedom. But let it not be supposed that the Conferences which Mr. Wesley called had any governing power. The members of the Conference

[1] Large Minutes of Conference, printed 1770; Whitehead's Life of Wesley, Vol. II, p. 308, Dublin Ed., 1806; Wesley's Works, Large Minutes, Vol. V, p. 231.

discussed, but Mr. Wesley decided. They debated, but he determined. Mr. Wesley was the government; and, though he invited the preachers to confer with him, he did not propose to abandon any of his original power. They had a voice by his permission, but he reserved the right to direct.

After the lapse of years his course was criticised, so that he deemed it necessary in 1766, about twenty-two years after the first Conference was held, to issue an explanation.

Reviewing the history of the Conferences, he said:

"In 1744 I wrote to several clergymen, and to all who then served me as sons in the gospel, desiring them to meet me in London, to give me their advice concerning the best method of carrying on the work of God. They did not desire this meeting; but I did, knowing that 'in a multitude of counselors there is safety.' And when their number increased, so that it was neither needful nor convenient to invite them all, for several years I wrote to those with whom I desired to confer; and these only met at the place appointed, till at length I gave a general permission that all who desired it might come. Observe! I myself sent for these, of my own free choice; and I sent for them to advise, not govern me. Neither did I at any of those times divest myself of any part of that power above described, which the providence of God had cast upon me without any design or choice of mine. What is that power? It is a power of admitting into and excluding from the societies under my care; of choosing and removing stewards; of receiving or of not receiving helpers; of appointing them when, where, and how to help me; and of desiring any of them to meet me when I see good. And as it was merely in obedience to the providence of God and for the good of the people that I at first accepted this power, which I never sought—nay, a hundred times labored to throw off—so it is on the same considerations, not for profit, honor, or pleasure,

that I use it at this day. But several gentlemen are much offended at my having so much power. My answer to them is this:

"'I did not seek any part of this power; it came upon me unawares. But when it was come, not daring to bury that talent, I used it to the best of my judgment; yet I never was fond of it. I always did, and do now, bear it as my burden—the burden which God lays upon me—and therefore I dare not yet lay it down.' But if you can tell me any one or any five men to whom I may transfer this burden, who can and will do just what I do now, I will heartily thank both them and you.

"But some of our helpers[1] say, 'This is shackling free-born Englishmen,' and demand a free Conference; that is, a meeting of all the preachers, wherein all things shall be determined by most votes.

"I answer: 'It is possible, after my death, something of this kind may take place; but not while I live. To me the preachers have engaged themselves to submit to serve me as sons in the gospel. But they are not thus engaged to any man, or number of men, beside. To me the people in general will submit. But they will not yet submit to any other.'

"It is nonsense, then, to call my using this power 'shackling free-born Englishmen.' None needs to submit to it unless he will; so there is no shackling in the case. Every preacher and every member may leave me when he pleases. But while he chooses to stay, it is on the same terms that he joined me at first.

"'But this is arbitrary power; this is no less than making yourself a pope.'

"If by arbitrary power you mean a power which I exercise singly, without any colleagues therein, this is certainly true; but I see no hurt in it. Arbitrary in this sense is a very harmless word. If you mean unjust, unreasonable, or tyrannical, then it is not true.

"As to the other branch of the charge, it carries no face

[1] A "helper" was a preacher on a circuit, but subordinate to the "assistant."

of truth. The pope affirms that every Christian must do all he bids, and believe all he says, under pain of damnation. I never affirmed anything that bears any the most distant resemblance to this. All I affirm is: 'The preachers who choose to labor with me, choose to serve me as sons in the gospel;' and 'the people who choose to be under my care, choose to be so on the same terms they were at first.'

"Therefore all talk of this kind is highly injurious to me, who bear this burden merely for your sakes. And it is exceedingly mischievous to the people, tending to confound their understandings, and to fill their hearts with evil surmisings and unkind tempers towards me, to whom they really owe more—for taking all this load upon me, for exercising this very power, for shackling myself in this manner—than for all my preaching put together; because preaching twice or thrice a day is no burden to me at all, but the care of all the preachers and all the people is a burden indeed."[1]

Again, in a letter written January, 1780, Mr. Wesley once more explains the situation, and defends himself as follows:

"It pleased God by me to awaken first my brother, and then a few others, who severally desired of me, as a favor, that I would direct them in all things. After my return from Georgia, many were both awakened and converted to God. One and another and another of these desired to join with me as sons in the gospel, to be directed by me. I drew up a few plain rules (observe, there was no Conference in being!) and permitted them to join me on these conditions. Whoever, therefore, violates these conditions, particularly that of being directed by me in the work, does, *ipso facto* [by the act itself], disjoin himself from me. This, Brother M. has done; but he can not see that he has done amiss, and he would have it a common cause; that is, he would have all the preachers do the same. He thinks 'they have a right so to do.' So they have. They have a right to disjoin themselves

[1] Minutes, 1776, Vol. I, pp. 61, 62; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, pp. 447, 448; Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. 5, pp. 220-222.

from me whenever they please; but they can not, in the nature of the thing, join with me any longer than they are directed by me. And what if fifty of the present preachers disjoin themselves? What should I lose thereby? Only a great deal of labor and care, which I do not seek, but endure because no one else can or will.

"You seem likewise to have quite a wrong idea of a Conference. For above six years after my return to England there was no such thing. I then desired some of our preachers to meet me, in order to advise, not control me. And, you may observe, they had no power at all but what I exercised through them. I chose to exercise the power which God had given me in this manner, both to avoid ostentation and gently to habituate the people to obey them when I should be taken from their head. But as long as I remain with them, the fundamental rule of Methodism remains inviolate. As long as any preacher joins with me, he is to be directed by me in his work. Do not you see, then, that Brother M., whatever his intentions might be, acted as wrong as wrong could be; and that the representing of this as the common cause of the preachers was the way to common destruction—the way to turn all their heads and to set them in arms? It was a blow at the very root of Methodism. I could not, therefore, do less than I did; it was the very least that could be done, for fear that evil should spread.

"I do not willingly speak of these things at all, but I do it now out of necessity; because I perceive the mind of you and some others is a little hurt by not seeing them in a true light."[1]

It was quite natural, after many years had passed, that preachers who had entered the ministry at a remote period from the early days and primitive conditions would feel a little restive in view of the fact that, though members of the Conference, they had no power of self-government, and it would not have been unnatural for some who had been with

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, p. 228.

Mr. Wesley from the early days to think the conditions had so changed that there could, with safety, be a division of power.

On the other hand, it was quite as natural and logical for Mr. Wesley to reason as he did. It was his movement, and the people and preachers had voluntarily asked him to assume the sphere of rulership. He felt that the responsibility for the success of the movement was upon him, and he saw no way of shifting that responsibility which would have been satisfactory to the preachers and people, and which at the same time would have insured the success of the cause. On his theory he need not have held any Conference, and his call for a Conference was really a concession; and, as he remarks, he "sent for them to advise, not govern him." He was willing to confer with them that he might gain valuable suggestions from their discussions, but he did not propose that the preachers in the Conference should "control" him. He was under no obligation to have a Conference at all; but, like a wise general, he called a council of his officers, listened to their ideas, and then issued his orders for the campaign of the year immediately following.

In the remarks just quoted, Wesley indicates his desire to place the burden of power upon others, but he does not see how it can be done, and therefore says: "I dare not yet lay it down." He also suggests that after his death power might be reposed in the Conference of all the preachers, who should determine their action by a majority vote.

Speaking of the power which he exercised through those who composed the Conference, it is to be observed that he says: "I chose to exercise the power which God had given me in this manner, both to avoid ostentation, and gently to habituate the people to obey them when I should be taken from their head;" so that he was preparing the preachers and people for a time when, death having released him from his responsibility, the power which he had possessed would be lodged in the Conference of ministers. For the present, however, he believed that it was absolutely essential to the existence of Methodism that the power of government should be exerted by him, for he said: "To me the people in general will submit. But they will not submit to any other." In a document which Mr. Wesley published in 1790 appears the following passage:

"As the number of preachers increased, it grew more and more difficult to fix the places where each should labor from time to time. I have often wished to transfer the work of stationing the preachers once a year to one or more of themselves. But none were willing to accept of it; so I must bear the burden till my warfare shall be accomplished."[1]

In course of years Wesley not only had his Conference, but also what has been called his "select committee of consultation,"[2] which was composed of a favored few, upon whom he felt he could place special reliance. It was, indeed, a sort of cabinet or private council, where, perhaps, there was greater freedom of speech than was deemed judicious in the

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, p. 330.
[2] Tyerman's Life of Wesley, Vol. III, p. 428.

larger body; but even here it would appear that Wesley reserved the right to act according to his own judgment, no matter what might be the views of his confidential counselors.

These facts show that while Mr. Wesley refused to abandon the power which he possessed at the beginning, nevertheless he made various concessions, and actually proposed to divest himself of some of his power, and transfer it to others during his lifetime; but as circumstances appeared from his point of view, the time had not come for abdication in any particular, and he believed the best he could do was to gradually prepare the way for self-government.

That the condition was anomalous is apparent. Generally speaking, no one man should have such authority, and Mr. Wesley foresaw that after him no man among the Methodists would be permitted to exercise such power of government. However, a strong argument can be drawn from the circumstances attending the birth of Methodism to maintain Mr. Wesley's claim for supreme control; but since his death there is no argument or circumstance which would give a shadow of support to the idea that in Methodism such supreme power should vest in any one man.

The people and preachers came to Mr. Wesley voluntarily, and placed themselves under his rulership. They freely accepted his direction, and were under no compulsion to remain in association with him. They could stay or go according to their own sweet will, and it is remarkable how few were dissatisfied with his administration.

Some may say that it was a despotic government; but if so, it was one the people and the preachers invited and to which they freely submitted, believing that, under the circumstances, from it they would receive the greatest benefit.

No doubt Mr. Wesley might have been called a despot, in the sense that a despot is "one who governs according to his own will, under a recognized right or custom, but uncontrolled by constitutional restrictions or the wishes of his subjects;"[1] but in the sense of absolute power, the government of the universe by the Supreme Ruler is a despotism which is just and good. If Mr. Wesley was an absolute ruler, he did not use his power for his own aggrandizement, but for the good of his voluntary subjects. He was not a despot in exercising an unjust and oppressive government, but was a cultured Christian, and his rule was kind, intelligent, self-sacrificing, and Christly. He did not govern by force, but only directed those who freely came to him and recognized him as a providential leader, who, by force of circumstances, had a right to rule. He was not responsible to the Conference, and was not controlled by any ecclesiastical organization, but he ever realized his responsibility to Almighty God and the needs of humanity.

Rather let us call it personal government in which he planned, toiled, and denied himself, while others reaped and enjoyed the benefits. It was a personal government, justified by the circumstances of its origin, by its Christly spirit, by its great wisdom, and

[1] Century Dictionary.

by the strength of Wesley's personal devotion to the interests of the governed; and was justified in its continuance as long as there was the willing acquiescence of the preachers and people.

It was a sort of paternal government, but one that was directed by the highest intelligence and conscientiousness; and, to say the least, that has some advantages over a mere mobocracy, where ignorance, prejudice, passion, and selfishness dominate. And it must be admitted that probably Methodism has never been more successfully and satisfactorily governed than by Wesley; not only because of the circumstances, but also because his control meant wisdom, sympathy, self-denial, and righteousness of an unusual type. Nevertheless the historic fact remains that Wesley's Conferences had no law-making function. The members of the Conference conferred, but the Conference did not decide.

The Rev. John Wesley was the government.

He made the laws; he made the appointments of the preachers; he decided who should be admitted into the societies and who should be excluded from the societies under his care; he said who should and who should not be received into the Methodist ministry; and the chapel property was so deeded that the trustees were compelled to admit him to the pulpit, and also to admit such preachers as he might appoint. In brief, Mr. Wesley embodied in himself supreme legislative, executive, and judicial functions. It was the era of personal government, and no matter what possible criticisms

may be suggested, it must be confessed that it was a righteous and marvelously successful government.

Nevertheless, no matter what may be said in justification of such centralized forms under such conditions, it must be admitted that under ordinary circumstances such concentrated authority gives a most dangerous form of government.

It is true that the best government is relative, and depends upon the character of the governed; but, whatever may be said as to formative periods, we can not doubt that where the governed have general intelligence and strong conscientiousness, the safest course is in the diffusion of power.

Wesley's government may be defended on the ground of peculiar conditions and successful results; but, with different conditions, a repetition of such control would be universally deprecated, and should not be tolerated.

CHAPTER II.

WESLEY'S EARLY PLANS FOR PERPETUATING BRITISH METHODISM AND ENDOWING THE CONFERENCE WITH POWER.

THE Rev. John Wesley did not at first realize the vastness of the work in which he had engaged; but when its real proportions began to be appreciated, he had no thought of ever permitting it to disappear, either during his life, or, if he could prevent it, after his death.

Moving forward at first without any particular plan, he followed what he believed were the indications of Providence, and so gradually found himself doing things which he believed were providentially right, but which would have shocked his early High-Churchism.

The result was that in the course of years there grew around him a great religious organization, which, years before his death, had spread throughout Great Britain and Ireland and beyond the seas. His societies and chapels dotted the kingdom, and his devoted preachers served wherever he sent them.

At no time had the Church of England any control over the Methodist societies, the Methodist chapels and schools, or the Methodist Conference. The Established Church had not, through convocation, bishop or archbishop, or in any other way,

exercised control over the Methodist movement. It never had belonged to the Establishment, though a number of its ministers had been regularly ordained clergymen of the State Church. Many of the members of the societies were connected with the parish Church, but other individuals in the societies never had any relation with the Church of England.

As an organization, Wesleyan Methodism never was connected with or under the control of the State Church. As it always had been distinct, it could not be severed from it. What it required was not separation, but a provision for its legal perpetuation.

There are many kinds of evidence to prove that Mr. Wesley never designed that it should be absorbed, or that it should be permitted to evaporate. As long as he lived and preserved his mental vigor, he could hold both preachers and people together; but he saw that serious difficulties might arise when death removed him from their midst.

The matter appeared to cost him much anxiety. The rules for the societies had become well understood, and the general economy of Methodism was well settled. In the Conferences Mr. Wesley had given the preachers a training which would be helpful when the time for self-government arrived, and yet there were many contingencies for which provision should be made.

In anticipation of possible difficulties, Mr. Wesley, on Friday, August 4, 1769, read to the Conference, then in session at Leeds, the following mode of procedure in case of his death, so that when he had ceased to

be the bond of union, organic Methodism would still be perpetuated:

"MY DEAR BRETHREN,—It has long been my desire that all those ministers of our Church who believe and preach salvation by faith, might cordially agree between themselves, and not hinder, but help one another. After occasionally pressing this in private conversation wherever I had opportunity, I wrote down my thoughts upon the head, and sent them to each in a letter. Out of fifty or sixty to whom I wrote, only three vouchsafed me an answer. So I gave this up. I can do no more. They are a rope of sand, and such they will continue. But it is otherwise with the traveling preachers in our Connection. You are at present one body; you act in concert with each other, and by united counsels. And now is the time to consider what can be done in order to continue this union. Indeed, as long as I live there will be no great difficulty. I am, under God, a center of union to all our traveling as well as local preachers.

"They all know me and my communication; they all love me for my work's sake; and, therefore, were it only out of regard to me, they will continue connected with each other. But by what means may this connection be preserved when God removes me from you?

"I take it for granted it can not be preserved by any means between those who have not a single eye. Those who aim at anything but the glory of God and the salvation of men—who desire or seek any earthly thing, whether honor, profit, or ease—will not, can not continue in the Connection; it will not answer their design. Some of them, perhaps a fourth of the whole number, will procure preferment in the Church. Others will turn Independents, and get separate congregations. Lay your accounts with this, and be not surprised if some you do not suspect be of this number. But what method can be taken to preserve a firm union between those who choose to remain together?

"Perhaps you might take some such steps as these:

"On notice of my death, let all the preachers in England and Ireland repair to London within six weeks.

"Let them seek God by solemn fasting and prayer.

"Let them draw up articles of agreement, to be signed by those who choose to act in concert.

"Let those be dismissed who do not choose it, in the most friendly manner possible.

"Let them choose, by votes, a committee of three, five, or seven, each of whom is to be moderator in his turn.

"Let the committee do what I do now,—propose preachers to be tried, admitted, or excluded, fix the place of each preacher for the ensuing year and the time of the next Conference.

"Can anything be done now in order to lay a foundation for this future union? Would it not be well for any that are willing to sign some articles of agreement before God calls me hence?

"Suppose something like these:

"We, whose names are underwritten, being thoroughly convinced of the necessity of a close union between those whom God is pleased to use as instruments in this glorious work, in order to preserve this union between ourselves, are resolved, God being our helper,—

"1. To devote ourselves entirely to God, denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, steadily aiming at one thing, to save our own souls and them that hear us.

"2. To preach the Old Methodist Doctrines, and no other, contained in the Minutes of the Conferences.

"3. To observe and enforce the whole Methodist Discipline, laid down in the said Minutes."[1]

One result of this proposition was that "the preachers then desired Mr. Wesley to extract the most material part of the Minutes, and send a copy to each assistant, which he might communicate to all his preachers in his circuit, to be seriously considered."[2]

In his "Short History of the People Called Meth-

[1] Minutes, 1769, Vol. I, pp. 87-89; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., pp. 13-15.

[2] Minutes, 1769, Vol. I, pp. 87-89; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, pp. 13-15; John Whitehead, M. D., Life of Wesley, Vol. II, pp. 305-307, Dublin, 1806.

odists," Wesley, referring to the first Conference held in 1744, says: "The result of our consultations we set down to be the rules of our future practice," and thus began a broad disciplinary system. In 1753, Wesley made his first collation from the Minutes of the several Conferences, and issued the first edition of the Large Minutes. In 1763 he issued a second edition.[1]

At the present date, 1769, sixteen Conferences had been held, and new rules, or new applications of old rules, had been accumulating since 1763, but were scattered through the several Annual Minutes. It was, therefore, a wise request that a digest of the Minutes should be made as a part of the plan for perpetuating Wesleyan Methodism after the decease of Mr. Wesley.

This request Mr. Wesley complied with the next year, when he issued an octavo pamphlet of sixty pages, entitled "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Messrs. John and Charles Wesley and Others." This publication, which has been called "The Large Minutes of Conference,"[2] was a new and enlarged edition of the Minutes published in 1763, embracing Minutes of all the Conferences held from that period to the year 1770.[3]

Thus was put in shape that which would be the formulated Discipline of Methodism, and the authority to which appeal could be made should Mr. Wesley pass away.

---

[1] L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. II, p. 474.
[2] Whitehead's Wesley, Vol. II, p. 308.
[3] L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 80.

The second result was the acceptance of the main proposition, and the signing the instrument pledging the preachers "to observe and enforce the whole Methodist Discipline, laid down in the said Minutes," etc.

Here, then, was a plan not only for the perpetuity of Methodist doctrine and Methodist discipline in general, but also for the perpetuity of the Conference, and its endowment with power to govern after his decease; and specifying that the Conference should "choose by votes" a committee, each member of which should be moderator in turn, and that the whole committee should have the power which had been concentrated in John Wesley. Perhaps from this suggestion of a committee grew the idea of a Stationing Committee, adopted in England after Wesley's death.

Dr. Whitehead states that "These articles were then signed by many of the preachers. But some years afterward others had influence enough, however, to prevail upon Mr. Wesley to relinquish the present plan, and leave the mode of union among the preachers, after his death, to their own deliberations."[1]

We are not quite sure as to the precise reference of Dr. Whitehead's remark. It might be supposed to have some relation to the matter which will be treated in the next chapter; but if so, the observation is not pertinent, for it meditated a distinct plan for a different object and a more mature arrangement involving the same purpose. We might imagine that

[1] Whitehead, Life of Wesley, Vol. II, p. 307.

perhaps it had some application to Wesley's desire that the Rev. John Fletcher, vicar of Madeley, should be his active assistant during his old age, and his probable successor in the Methodist leadership after his decease; but the points do not fit.

It is proper, however, that a word should be said in regard to the later project. The Rev. Jean Guillaume de la Fléchière—or, as he was generally called in England, his adopted country, John William Fletcher—was born in Switzerland, September 12, 1729, so that he was about twenty-five years younger than Mr. Wesley. He belonged to a distinguished family, and was highly educated. His parents intended him for the pulpit; but his preference was for a soldier's life, and at twenty he entered the service of Portugal as captain. At last he found his way to England, and, about 1755, joined the Methodists. On the 6th of March, 1757, when in his twenty-eighth year, he was ordained deacon in the English Church, at the Chapel Royal, St. James's, and the following Sunday, March 13th, he was ordained priest, at Whitehall, London, by the Bishop of Bangor.

Fletcher's devotion to Mr. Wesley was very great, and as soon as he was ordained priest he hastened to the West Street Chapel, to assist Wesley in administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.[1]

In his Journal, under date of Sunday, March 13, 1757, Mr. Wesley has this entry: "Finding myself weak at Snowfields, I prayed (if he saw good) that

[1] L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. II, p. 263; see Wesley's Sermon on the Death of Mr. Fletcher, Ser. LVIII, Amer. Ed.

God would send me help at the chapel, and I had it. A clergyman, whom I never saw before, came and offered me his assistance; and as soon as I had done preaching, Mr. Fletcher came, who had just then been ordained priest, and hastened to the chapel on purpose to assist, as he supposed me to be alone." The following Sunday, March 20th, he adds this note: "Mr. Fletcher helped me again. How wonderful are the ways of God! When my bodily strength failed, and none in England were able and willing to assist me, he sent me help from the mountains of Switzerland, and a helpmeet for me in every respect. Where could I have found such another?"[1]

This is the man who, when offered the living of Dunham, in Cheshire, which was worth about £400 a year, thanked his patron, and replied: "Alas! sir, Dunham will not suit me; there is too much money and too little labor;" and then accepted Madeley, where the living was not worth half as much, and where the work was harder and among a people generally notorious for their ignorance and impiety.[2]

He was a most devoted pastor, an eloquent preacher, and a great polemical writer. Fletcher was indeed the great Methodist controversialist, and though he was saintly in the gentleness of his life, he struck vigorous blows in defense of Methodist Arminianism.[3] He was Wesley's champion, an attendant at his Conferences, and, notwithstanding the

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. III, Journal, p. 623.

[2] Rev. Robert Cox, A. M., Life of Rev. John William Fletcher, 1st Amer. Ed., pp. 33-35.

[3] See his Checks to Antinomianism.

difference in their years, one of his most reliable counselors. In him sweetness and strength combined.

The Rev. John Venn, vicar of Huddersfield, exclaimed: "Fletcher was a luminary. A luminary, did I say? He was a sun. I have known all the great men for these fifty years, but I have known none like him. I was intimately acquainted with him, and was once under the same roof with him for six weeks together, during which time I never heard him say a single word which was not proper to be spoken, and which had not a tendency to minister grace to the hearers."[1]

In 1770, Mr. Fletcher made a visit to Nyon, Switzerland, his native place, and, by his public preaching and private character, he deeply impressed those who heard or came in contact with him; so much so, indeed, that a venerable clergyman earnestly urged him to lengthen his stay among them. Finding that his request could not be granted, he turned to Mr. Fletcher's traveling companion, and, with tears in his eyes, exclaimed: "O, sir, how unfortunate for this country! During my day it has produced but one angel, and it is our lot to be deprived of him."[2]

In his sermon on the death of Mr. Fletcher, who died on Sunday evening, August 14, 1785, in the fifty-sixth year of his age, Mr. Wesley remarks: "I was intimately acquainted with him for above thirty years. I conversed with him morning, noon, and night, without the least reserve, during a journey

---

[1] Rev. Robert Cox, Life of Fletcher, 1st Amer. Ed., p. 174.

[2] Rev. Robert Cox, A. M., Life of Rev. John William Fletcher, 1st Amer. Ed., 1837, p. 75.

of many hundred miles, and in all that time I never heard him speak one improper word nor saw him do an improper action. To conclude: Many exemplary men have I known, holy in heart and life, within fourscore years, but one equal to him have I not known—one so inwardly and outwardly devoted to God. So unblamable a character in every respect I have not found either in Europe or America, nor do I expect to find another such on this side of eternity."[1]

Surely no one will wonder if Mr. Wesley for a time entertained the thought of making this marvelous man his general assistant, and of presenting him as the proper person to succeed him.

Possibly, Mr. Wesley had doubts as to whether the Conference, when left to itself after his death, would agree and hold together after it had for so long a time learned to depend upon the leadership of one man. The thought may have occurred to him that, even with the Conference free to govern itself, it would need a specially able chief. However it may have been, to his mind Fletcher was the best fitted, and, being twenty-five years his junior, would in all probability outlive him.

In January, 1773, John Wesley spent some time at Shoreham, doubtless for the purpose of consulting the venerable Vicar of Shoreham, the Reverend Vincent Perronet, who was born of Swiss-French parentage about the year 1700, and therefore was two or three years older than Mr. Wesley. Both of his sons—Charles and Edward Perronet—became inti-

[1] Wesley's Sermons, Amer. Ed., Vol. I, p. 533.

mately acquainted with the Wesleys at Oxford, and were Methodist preachers for years. John Wesley found in the vicar a true friend, a warm admirer, and a most confidential counselor. So intimate were their relations that Charles Wesley called him the "Archbishop of Methodism."

The records are silent as to what was said at that visit; but from Shoreham, John Wesley thus wrote to his beloved Fletcher:

"DEAR SIR,—What an amazing work has God wrought in these kingdoms in less than forty years! And it not only continues, but increases throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland; nay, it has lately spread into New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina. But the wise men of the world say: 'When Mr. Wesley drops, then all this is at an end.' And so it surely will, unless, before God calls him hence, one is found to stand in his place. For

Οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανιη· εἷς κοιρανος ἔστω.[1]

I see more and more, unless there be one προεστως,[2] the work can never be carried on. The body of the preachers are not united, nor will any part of them submit to the rest; so that there must be one to preside over all, or the work will indeed come to an end.

"But who is sufficient for these things? Qualified to preside both over the preachers and people? He must be a man of faith and love, and one that has a single eye to the advancement of the kingdom of God. He must have a clear understanding; a knowledge of men and things, particularly of the Methodist doctrine and discipline; a ready utterance; diligence and activity; with a tolerable share of health. There must be added to these, favor with the people—with the Methodists in general. For unless God turn their eyes and hearts toward him, he will be quite incapable of the work. He must likewise have some degree of learning; because there are many

[1] The rule of the many is not good; let there be one ruler.

[2] Set at the head as leader; one who presides over the rest.

adversaries, learned as well as unlearned, whose mouths must be stopped. But this can not be done, unless he be able to meet them on their own ground.

"But has God provided one so qualified? Who is he? Thou art the man! God has given you a measure of loving faith, and a single eye to his glory. He has given you some knowledge of men and things, particularly of the whole plan of Methodism. You are blessed with some health, activity, and diligence, together with a degree of learning. And to all these he has lately added, by a way none could have foreseen, favor both with the preachers and the whole people. Come out, in the name of God! Come to the help of the Lord against the mighty! Come, while I am alive and capable of labor—

> "'Dum superest Lachesi quod torqueat, et pedibus me
> Porto meis, nullo dextram subeunte bacillo.'[1]

"Come, while I am able, God assisting, to build you up in the faith, to ripen your gifts, and to introduce you to the people. *Nil tanti.*[2] What possible employment can you have which is of so great importance?

"But you will naturally say: 'I am not equal to the task; I have neither grace nor gifts for such an employment.' You say true; it is certain you have not—and who has? But do you not know Him who is able to give them? Perhaps not at once; but rather day by day, as each is, so shall your strength be. 'But this implies,' you may say, 'a thousand crosses, such as I feel I am not able to bear.'

"You are not able to bear them *now*, and they are not *now* come. Whenever they do come, will He not send them in due number, weight, and measure? And will they not all be for your profit, that you may be a partaker of His holiness?

"Without conferring, therefore, with flesh and blood, come and strengthen the hands, comfort the heart, and share the labors of your affectionate friend and brother,

"JOHN WESLEY."[3]

---

[1] While Lachesis has some thread of life to spin, and I walk on my own feet without the help of a staff. (Juvenal, Sat. iii.)

[2] Nothing is of so much concern.

[3] Whitehead's Life of Wesley, Dublin, 1806, Vol. II, pp. 342-344; Wesley's Works, Am. Ed., Vol. VI, pp. 687, 688.

The letter evidently grew out of Wesley's anxiety for the perpetuity of Methodism. Seeing the rapid growth of the societies, "he became, therefore," says Dr. Whitehead, the author of the "Life of Wesley," "every day more solicitous to provide for their unity and permanency after his decease, wishing to preserve at the same time the original doctrines and economy of the Methodists. He knew the views and opinions of the preachers better than any other individual possibly could, having persons in all places who constantly informed him of everything of importance that was said or done. From the beginning he had stood at the head of the Connection, and by the general suffrage had acted as dictator in matters relating to the government of the societies. He had often found that all his authority was barely sufficient to preserve peace and unanimity, and seemed to conclude that if his authority were to cease, or not to be transferred to another at his death, the preachers and people would fall into confusion."[1]

Dr. Whitehead, commenting on Wesley's letter to Fletcher, says:

"This warm and sincere invitation to a situation not only respected, but even reverenced, by so large a body of people, must have been highly pleasing to Mr. Fletcher, especially as it came from a person he most sincerely loved, whose superior abilities, learning, and labors he admired, and to whose success in the ministry he wished to give every assistance in his power. But he well knew the occasional embarrassments Mr. Wesley met with in the government of some preachers,

[1] John Whitehead, M. D., Life of Wesley, Dublin, 1806, Vol. II, pp. 341, 342.

though he alone, under the providence of God, had given existence to their present character, influence, and usefulness; and that a determination prevailed among them not to be under the control of any one man after the death of Mr. Wesley. Under these circumstances, he probably saw nothing before him but storms and tempests, especially if he should live to be alone in the office. He therefore determined not to launch his little bark on so tempestuous an ocean."[1]

This is certainly a very strange reason for Dr. Whitehead to give, and the inference is not sustained by the facts. Mr. Fletcher was not a timid man, but a man of great courage, and if he believed a thing was his duty he would have laid down his life in its discharge. Further, Mr. Fletcher was such a pure and transparent man that had Dr. Whitehead's reason been Mr. Fletcher's motive for declining the invitation at that time, he would certainly have revealed it in his reply. But we will permit the letter to speak for itself.

Before presenting the letter, however, we should quote some observations made by the Rev. Henry Moore, one of the trustees of Mr. Wesley's manuscripts. Referring to the remarks of Dr. Whitehead, he says: "He wrote on a subject with which he was wholly unacquainted. The *charity* of his surmisings is, however, very manifest. He did not know that Mr. Fletcher had ever answered Mr. Wesley's letter; but I am happy in being able to lay his answer before the reader, who will see in it the very different spirit of that man of God. His faith, indeed, respecting the continuance of the *whole body* of the preachers

[1] J. Whitehead, Life of Wesley, Dublin, 1806, Vol. II, p. 344.

in their first calling seems to have been shaken, as Mr. Wesley's also was; but there is no such feeling expressed as that which festered in the mind of Dr. Whitehead. His attachment to that work, which he fully believed to be of God, is also strikingly evident. He certainly could not be easily persuaded to take the station which Mr. Wesley wished him to take, as his well-known humility used to give the preachers trouble by his constantly preferring them before himself. But he certainly would have taken a most decided part in the work if his total loss of health, which obliged him to leave his parish and to retire to Switzerland, had not prevented it. Upon his return, with his strength renewed in some degree, he married, and thus became settled in his parish, evidencing to the last his ardent love to the work of God, and to those who were employed in it. At the last Conference which he attended, in the year 1784 (the year before his death), he entreated Mr. Wesley to put Madeley into the Minutes as a Methodist circuit, and that he might be put down as a supernumerary there; thus wishing to be still more united to those whom he so much loved."[1]

The reply of Mr. Fletcher does not contain a single sentiment to sustain Dr. Whitehead's inference. While he does not accept the appointment, he does not peremptorily and permanently refuse. He wants "a *fuller* persuasion that the time has come," and proposes to pray for light, and intimates that, when the

[1] Rev. Henry Moore, only surviving trustee of Mr. Wesley's MSS., Life of Rev. John Wesley, A. M., Amer. Ed., 1825, Vol. II, p. 217.

time of need comes at Wesley's death, if he is still living, he "will not be backward to throw in his mite."

His letter will more fully represent his case. It is as follows:

"MADELEY, 6th February, 1773.

"REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,—I hope the Lord, who has so wonderfully stood by you hitherto, will preserve you to see many of your sheep, and *me* among the rest, enter into rest. Should Providence call you first, I shall do my best, by the Lord's assistance, to help *your brother* to gather the wreck and keep together those who are not absolutely bent upon throwing away the Methodist doctrine or discipline, as soon as he that now letteth shall be removed out of their way. Every little help will then be necessary, and I hope I shall not be backward to throw in my mite.

"In the meantime, you stand sometimes in need of an assistant to serve tables and occasionally to fill up a gap. Providence visibly appointed me to that office many years ago; and though it no less evidently called me here, yet I have not been without doubt, especially for some years past, whether it would not be expedient that I should resume my place as your deacon; not with any view of presiding over the Methodists after you (God knows!), but to save you a little in your old age, and be in the way of receiving, and perhaps of doing, more good. I have sometimes considered how shameful it was that no clergyman should join you to keep in the Church the work which the Lord had enabled you to carry on therein; and, as the little estate I have in my native country is sufficient for my maintenance, I have thought I would one day or other offer you and the Methodists my *free* services.

"While my love of retirement, and my dread of appearing upon a higher stage than that I stand upon here, made me linger, I was providentially called to do something in Lady Huntingdon's plan; but being shut out there, it appears to me I am again called to my first work.

"Nevertheless, I would not leave this place without a *fuller* persuasion that the time is quite come. Not that God uses me

much *now* among my parishioners, but because I have not sufficiently cleared my conscience from the blood of all men, especially with regard to 'erreting out the poor, and expostulating with the rich, who make it their business to fly from me. In the meantime, it shall be my emp'oyment to beg the Lord to give me light, to guide me by his counsel, and make me willing to go anywhere or nowhere, to be anything or nothing.

"I have laid my pen aside for some time; nevertheless resumed it last week, at your brother's request to go on with my treatise on Christian Perfection I have made some alteration in the sheets you have seen, and hope to have a few more ready for your correction against the time you come this way.

"How deep is the subject! What need have I of 'the Spirit to search the deep things of God!' Help me by your prayers, till you can help me by word of mouth.

"Reverend and dear sir, your willing though unprofitable servant in the gospel, J. FLETCHER."[1]

This letter was not a positive refusal. While he was not convinced that it was his duty at the present time, he nevertheless took the matter under advisement, with the assurance that when the emergency was reached he would endeavor to do his part.

Mr. Moore, in his "Life of Wesley," asserts that the idea of having Mr. Fletcher at the head of Methodism when Mr. Wesley passed away did not originate in Mr. Wesley's thought, but with the preachers. He says: "The wish to have Mr. Fletcher at their head, in case of Mr. Wesley's removal, originated with themselves. They pressed Mr. Wesley to apply to him, and on his reporting Mr. Fletcher's answer, they were so encouraged that they requested

[1] Rev. Henry Moore, Life of John Wesley, Amer. Ed. 1825, Vol. II, pp. 217, 218.

that the application should be renewed. Mr. Wesley replied in his usual short way: 'He will not come out unless the Lord should baptize him for it.'"[1]

It is plain that the preachers did not interpret the reply as a peremptory negative, but it is equally plain that Mr. Wesley did not propose to press Mr. Fletcher faster than his own prayerful judgment would lead.

Mr. Fletcher was not only a favorite with Mr. Wesley, but also with Wesley's preachers. Mr. Fletcher's connection with Lady Huntingdon's Trevecca College led him, at an early moment, to come to the defense of Mr. Wesley when the Conference Minutes of 1770 were objected to by Lady Huntingdon and some of her Calvinistic friends. The Minutes proclaimed Wesleyan Arminianism, and Fletcher wrote his "Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Last Minutes." In this pamphlet of ninety-eight pages, which was published in 1771, the author furnishes a fearful description of the Antinomianism so prevalent at that time.[2]

Then his celebrated "Checks to Antinomianism" followed in rapid succession, so that, by the end of 1772, Fletcher was hailed, wherever the controversy was familiar, as the champion of Wesleyan Arminianism as against Calvinism. Wesley, too busy at his time of life to take the leisure for such writing, committed the burden to the younger man, and the Meth-

[1] Rev. Henry Moore, Life of John Wesley, Amer. Ed., 1825, Vol. II, p. 219.

[2] L. Tyerman, Life of Wesley, Vol. III, pp. 100-102.

odists generally looked to him as their defender. His polemical ability, as well as his sanctity, caused the preachers to look toward Fletcher as Wesley's successor, and hence Wesley's invitation.

It appears that, even after the reception of Fletcher's letter, Wesley, in the early part of July of the same year, had an interview with Fletcher at Madeley, where the invitation appears to have been renewed, but with a result no more favorable. On returning to London, Mr. Wesley sent Fletcher the following letter:

"LEWISHAM, July 21, 1773.

"DEAR SIR,—It was a great satisfaction to me that I had the opportunity, which I so long desired, of spending a little time with you; and I really think it would answer many gracious designs of Providence were we to spend a little more time together. It might be of great advantage, both to ourselves and the people, who may otherwise soon be as sheep without a shepherd. You say, indeed, whenever it pleases God to call me away, you will do all you can to help them. But will it not then be too late? You may then expect grievous wolves to break in on every side, and many to arise from among themselves speaking perverse things. Both the one and the other stand in awe of me, and do not care to encounter me; so that I am able, whether they will or no, to deliver the flock into your hands. But no one else is; and it seems that it is the very time when it may be done with the least difficulty. Just now the minds of the people in general are, on account of the 'Checks,' greatly prejudiced in your favor. Should we not discern the providential time? Should we stay till the impression is worn away? Just now we have an opportunity of breaking the ice—of making a little trial. Mr. Richardson is desirous of making an exchange with you, and spending two or three weeks at Madeley. This might be done either now or in October, when I hope to return from Bristol; and until something of this kind is done you will not have

that στοργη [affection] for the people which alone can make your labor light in spending and being spent for them. Methinks 't is pity we should lose any time; for what a vapor is life!

"I am, dear sir, your affectionate friend and brother,

"JOHN WESLEY."[1]

How tenderly he tries to induce him to break the ice and make a little trial! What a good opportunity to make a little tour when another clergyman is willing to take his place for two or three weeks! What a providential period, when the people are so favorably impressed by his polemical productions! So he gently suggests, but in vain. The good man does not feel providentially called at that time.

About two weeks later, on the 3d of August, the Conference of 1773 commenced. Wesley had failed to secure the assent of Fletcher to his proposition, yet he was evidently impressed with the importance of doing something to insure the perpetuity of Methodism; so we find Wesley again bringing forward the plan first presented in the Conference of 1769, "in order to lay a foundation for this future union." The agreement was as follows:

"We, whose names are underwritten, being thoroughly convinced of the necessity of a close union between those whom God is pleased to use as instruments in this glorious work, in order to preserve this union between ourselves, are resolved, God being our helper,

"I. To devote ourselves entirely to God—denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, steadily aiming at one thing, to save our own souls and them that hear us.

"II. To preach the old Methodist doctrines, and no other, contained in the Minutes of the Conferences.

[1] L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 150.

"III. To observe and enforce the whole Methodist Discipline, laid down in the said Minutes."

This conferential compact had been signed at the Conference of 1769, and now it is once more signed by the forty-seven preachers who were present at the Conference of 1773.[1]

Whether Wesley renewed this agreement because he had failed to obtain the consent of Fletcher may be an open question in the minds of some; but he presented it in 1769, before Fletcher was thought of either by himself or his preachers for the position of president and successor, and it is our opinion that, even if Fletcher had consented, the plan would have been presented for the purpose of binding the preachers together. The same proposition was presented and signed in the Conferences of 1774 and 1775. This seems to indicate a deliberate and continued purpose on the part of Mr. Wesley. Referring to the outlines of a plan for the future union of the preachers, presented in 1769, Peirce, in his work on the Wesleyan Polity, says: "Having left these propositions with the preachers, that they might consider them maturely, he brought them forward at the Conferences of 1773, 1774, and 1775, at each of which they received the signatures of all the preachers present, amounting in number to one hundred and one."[2]

There is another allusion to Fletcher's succeeding

---

[1] L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, pp. 156, 157.

[2] William Peirce, Ecclesiatical Principles and Polity of Wesleyan Methodists, revised by Frederick J. Jobson, D. D., London, 3d Ed., p. 442.

Mr. Wesley, which should be recalled before we pass from this subject. In the beginning of the year 1776, Mr. Fletcher had so far recovered from a severe illness that Mr. Wesley, thinking easy journeys would benefit him, sent him an invitation to accompany him in the spring on some of his official tours among the societies. In his answer Mr. Fletcher said:

"I received last night the favor of yours from Bristol. My grand desire is to be just what the Lord will have me to be. I could, if you wanted a traveling assistant, accompany you, as my little strength would admit, in some of your excursions. But your recommending me to the societies as one who might succeed you, should the Lord take you hence before me, is a step to which I could by no means consent. It would make me take my horse and gallop away. Besides, such a step would, at this juncture, I think, be peculiarly improper. We ought to give as little hold to the evil surmisings and rash judgments of our opponents as may be. What has made me glut our friends with my books is not any love to such publications, but a desire to make an end of the controversy. It is probable that my design has miscarried, and that I have disgusted rather than convinced the people."[1]

No doubt Mr. Wesley gave up the idea very reluctantly, for he had a lofty opinion as to Mr. Fletcher's capabilities. Of him he declared:

"I can never believe it was the will of God that such a burning and shining light should be hid under a bushel. No; instead of being confined to a country village, it ought to have shone in every corner of our land. He was full as much called to sound an alarm through all the nation as Mr. Whitefield himself; nay, abundantly more so, seeing he was far better qualified for that important work. He had a far more

[1] Rev. Henry Moore, Life of John Wesley, Amer. Ed., 1825, Vol. II, p. 223.

striking person, equal good breeding, an equally winning address, together with a richer flow of fancy, a stronger understanding, a far greater treasure of learning, both in languages, philosophy, philology, and divinity; and, above all, a more deep and constant communion with the Father, and with the Son, Jesus Christ."[1]

Whether it was Mr. Wesley's intention to transmit to Mr. Fletcher the precise form and quantity of governmental authority which he possessed and used, may be considered an open question.

If he did so intend, his purpose was defeated, first, by Mr. Fletcher's declination; and secondly, by Mr. Fletcher's decease; for he died before Mr Wesley.

It may be that, though he desired Mr. Fletcher to be chief, at the same time he intended that the latter should act conjointly with the Conference; for his proposition of 1769 suggested that the Conference should elect a small committee to do what he had done. Under this, the Conference could have elected Mr. Fletcher as one of the committee.

Mr. Wesley may have meant more; but if he did, his purpose had come to naught. Whatever may have been his intentions in regard to this particular matter, there is no doubt as to the plan which he had matured.

By the acts of 1769, 1773, 1774, and 1775, he had provided in a systematic manner, not only for the perpetuity of the Methodist organization and the continuance of its doctrines and economy, but he had further provided in particular that which was entirely

[1] Wesley's Works, Eng. Ed., Vol. XI, p. 288; L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 150.

new in Methodism; namely, that the centralized personal government which he had exerted should cease to exist with his death, and that the governmental power he had used should be vested in the body of preachers called the Conference.

John Wesley was now in his seventy-third year, and there was a possibility, or even a probability, of his speedy departure; but with the preachers pledged to stand together and be true to Methodist doctrine and discipline, and with the governing power lodged in the Conference, the members of which body had been trained under Wesley, there was reason to believe that under the above arrangement the work of Methodism might be carried forward, both smoothly and successfully.

CHAPTER III.

MR. WESLEY'S FINAL PLAN FOR PERPETUATING AND EMPOWERING THE CONFERENCE.

A FEW years after the plan presented in 1769, and renewed in later years, had been generally accepted by the preachers, a grave difficulty presented itself. This difficulty was of a legal character, and grew out of questions in relation to the title to the chapel property. Indeed, in some form, it had existed from an early day.

The first Methodist preaching-house was built at Bristol, in 1739, and Mr. Wesley promptly settled the property on eleven feoffees. At once the Rev. George Whitefield and others objected, because this form of settlement gave those who held the property such complete control of it that they could say who should and who should not officiate on the premises, and thus had power at any time to exclude Mr. Wesley himself.[1]

Mr. Wesley remarks:

"I had not at first the least apprehension or design of being personally engaged either in the expense of this work or in the direction of it, having appointed eleven feoffees, on whom I supposed these burdens would fall, of course. But I quickly found my mistake—first, with regard to the expense; for the whole undertaking must have stood still had not I im-

[1] Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., p. 591; L. Tyerman's Life of John Wesley, Vol. I, p. 270.

mediately taken upon myself the payment of all the workmen, so that, before I knew where I was, I had contracted a debt of more than a hundred and fifty pounds; and this I was to discharge how I could, the subscriptions of both societies not amounting to one-quarter of the sum. And as to the direction of the work, I presently received letters from my friends in London, Mr. Whitefield in particular, backed with a message by one just come from thence, that neither he nor they would have anything to do with the building, neither contribute anything towards it, unless I would instantly discharge all feoffees and do everything in my own name. Many reasons they gave for this; but one was enough, viz.: 'That such feoffees would always have it in their power to control me, and if I preached not as they liked, to turn me out of the room that I had built.' I accordingly yielded to their advice, and, calling all the feoffees together, canceled (no man opposing) the instruments made before, and took the whole management into my own hands. Money, it is true, I had not, nor any human prospect or probability of procuring it. But I knew 'the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof,' and in his name set out, nothing doubting."[1]

Again, Mr. Wesley says at another time:

"I built the first Methodist preaching-house, so called, at Bristol, in the year 1739; and, knowing no better, I suffered the deed of trust to be drawn up in the Presbyterian form. But Mr. Whitefield, hearing of it, wrote me a warm letter, asking: 'Do you consider what you do? If the trustees are to name the preachers, they may exclude even you from preaching in the house you have built. Pray let this deed be immediately canceled.' To this the trustees readily agreed. Afterward I built the preaching-houses in Kingswood and at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. But none beside myself had any right to appoint the preachers in them."[2]

In the early part of his career, nearly all the chapels were vested in Mr. Wesley himself—a matter involving serious responsibility while he lived, but

[1] Rev. Henry Moore's Life of Wesley, Vol. I, p. 363.
[2] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, pp. 326, 327.

apt to create grave complications at his death. To this his attention was called, and he observes: "As the houses at Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle were my property, a friend reminded me that they were all liable to descend to my heirs. . . . I was struck, and immediately procured a form to be drawn up by three of the most eminent counselors in London, whereby not only these houses, but all the Methodist houses hereafter to be built, might be settled on such a plan as would secure them, so far as human prudence could, from the heirs of the proprietors for the purpose originally intended."[1]

In his Journal, May 23, 1746, he says: "I made over the houses in Bristol and Kingswood, and the next week that at Newcastle, to seven trustees, reserving only to my brother and myself the liberty of preaching and lodging there." Again, on March 19, 1747, he makes this entry: "I considered, 'What would I do now, if I was sure I had but two days to live?' All outward things are settled to my wish. The houses at Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle are safe; the deeds whereby they are conveyed to the trustees took place on the 5th instant; my will is made. What have I more to do but to commend my soul to my merciful and faithful Creator?"

Some years afterward, Mr. Wesley obtained and published a model form of a trust deed for the settlement of the chapels, to the effect that the trustees, for the time being, should permit Mr. Wesley, and such other persons as he might from time to time ap-

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, p. 327.

point, to have the free use of such premises, to preach and expound God's Holy Word therein. In case of his death the same right was reserved for his brother Charles, if he survived; and, providing that if both the Wesleys had deceased, the same prerogatives were to belong to the Rev. William Grimshaw, a Cambridge graduate, who had been regularly ordained in the Church of England, and in 1742 was appointed to the perpetual curacy of Haworth, in Yorkshire, but in 1745 had entered into a close union with the Methodists, and acted as Mr. Wesley's assistant in what was known as the Haworth Circuit.[1] The trust deed also recited that, after the death of John and Charles Wesley and William Grimshaw, the chapels were to be held in trust for the sole use of such persons as might be appointed at "The Yearly Conference of the People called Methodists;" provided, that the said persons preached and expounded God's Holy Word therein according to the doctrines contained in Mr. Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, and his four volumes of sermons, and no others.[2]

Having published this model deed, Mr. Wesley then gave directions that "no chapels or preaching-rooms should be undertaken without the consent of the assistant, and in every case to be settled in the manner described in the said deed."[3]

---

[1] Mr. Grimshaw died in 1763.

[2] L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. II, pp. 478, 479; Vol. III, p. 417; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., p. 592; Minutes of Several Conversations, 1763, 12mo, 30 pages, pp. 25–27.

[3] Minutes 1763, Vol. I, p. 604; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., p. 592.

In 1765 it was reported that some of the chapels had not been legally settled, and that in some places trustees had died and the vacancies had not been filled.[1] To remedy this, the following order was taken: "Let a person be sent through England to survey the deeds and supply the trustees wanting."[2]

It will be observed that all this antedates the plan proposed in 1769 for perpetuating Methodist doctrine, Methodist economy, Methodist discipline, and the Methodist Conference; but in a large sense it anticipates and involves the other, for it looks forward to the Conference as the successor of the Wesleys and Grimshaw; conveys the use of the chapel property for the use of the Conference through those appointed at the Conference, provided they preach Wesleyan doctrines. Thus the tendency through the property rights involved was to hold people and preachers together, and continue the Conference with impliedly the same rights and powers in all respects as had been used by John Wesley himself.

Tyerman tells us that "Mr. Pawson, in his manuscript memoir of Dr. Whitehead, states that, from the year 1750, all Methodist chapels were settled according to the provisions of the model deed that has been already mentioned; but several of the 'wisest and best preachers' were not satisfied, and from time to time brought up the matter at the yearly Conferences, and earnestly urged Wesley to do something

[1] Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., p. 592; and Minutes.
[2] Minutes, 1765, Vol. I, p. 50.

more to preserve the chapels for the purpose which the original builders intended."[1]

Hence, in 1767, the inquiry was made:

"Are our preaching-houses settled in our form safe? Should we not have the opinion of a counsel?"

After mature deliberation, Mr. Wesley, in his characteristic style, thus replied:

"I think not. 1. Because the form was drawn up by three eminent counselors. But, 2. It is the way of every counsel to blame what another counsel has done; but you can not at all infer that they think it wrong because they say so. 3. If they did in reality think it wrong, that would not prove that it was so. 4. If there was (which I do not believe) some defect therein, who would go to law with the body of Methodists? 5. And if they did, would any court in England put them out of possession, especially when the intent of the deed is plain and undeniable?"[2]

Tyerman observes that "such reasoning failed to satisfy the preachers, especially Messrs. Hampson and Oddie, both of whom, says Pawson, 'were men of remarkably deep understanding and sound judgment.'"[3] And yet there is not a little good sense in Wesley's logic.

Wesley, however, was influenced by the pressure which had been brought to bear on him, and various expedients were suggested and resorted to for

[1] L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 420.

[2] Minutes, 1767, Vol. I, p. 73; Peirce, Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., p. 593; L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 420.

[3] L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 420.

the purpose of making the hold upon the property more secure.[1]

Before this question was settled, Mr. Wesley received an important addition to his corps of ministers in the person of the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., a clergyman of the Church of England. Dr. Coke was a gentleman of wealth, and a graduate of Oxford University. At the age of twenty-one he had been chosen common councilman for the borough of Brecon; at the age of twenty-five he had been elected chief magistrate; and on June 17, 1775, when less than twenty-eight years of age, he had received from Oxford University the degree of Doctor of Civil Law.

This remarkable young man was only about thirty when, in 1777, he associated himself with Mr. Wesley, and from him received an appointment as a Methodist minister. His name, however, for some unknown reason, did not appear in the Minutes until 1778.[2]

Wesley quickly perceived the value of this new acquisition, and in 1780 appointed Dr. Coke to superintend the affairs of the London Circuit, and bestowed on him various proofs of his great confidence. Among others, Wesley "determined that in Ireland he should visit the societies alternately with himself, thus making between them in that kingdom an annual visit."[3]

[1] Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, pp. 420, 421; Peirce, Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., p. 593; Minutes, 1768, 1775.

[2] Samuel Drew, Life of Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., Amer. Ed., p. 40.

[3] Samuel Drew, Life of Dr. Coke, Amer. Ed., p. 42.

Dr. Coke's education, social training, and natural ability prepared him for the position of a leader. He was soon recognized as a positive force in the Methodist movement. Wesley intrusted him with matters of great moment; and he soon took an active interest in the chapel question, which appeared to be steadily gaining greater momentum.

In 1782 a local difficulty, involving the power of appointing preachers to a certain chapel, culminated, reopened the whole question, and tended to produce a state of general disorganization. It had reference to the chapel at Birstal, Yorkshire. Mr. Wesley states that—

"A preaching-house was built at Birstal by contributions and collections.[1] And John Nelson, knowing no better, suffered a deed to be drawn in the Presbyterian form, giving twelve or thirteen persons power not only of placing but even of displacing the preachers at their pleasure. Had Mr. Whitefield or I known this, we should have insisted on its either being canceled, like that at Bristol, or so altered as to insure the application of the house to the purpose for which it was built without giving so dangerous a power to any trustees whatever. . . . In process of time the preaching-house at Birstal became abundantly too small for the congregation. It was then proposed to build a new one. And a new deed was prepared, which, like the old, gave a few persons the power of placing and displacing the preachers at their pleasure. This was brought and read to me at Daw Green. As soon as ever I heard it, I vehemently objected to it, and positively refused to sign it. I now thought I had done with it, but in the evening several persons came again, and importunately urged me to sign it; averring that it was the same in effect with the old deed, and the old deed could not be

[1] It was built about 1751. (Tyerman, Vol. III, p. 373.)

altered. Not adverting that it was altered in the new one, I at length unwillingly complied.

"But observe: whether I did right or wrong herein, or in any other instance, it does not affect the merits of the cause. The dwelling upon this is mere finesse, to divert us from the one question, 'Is that deed right or wrong?' These things were mentioned at the ensuing Conference [1782], and it was asked, 'What can be done?'"[1]

Peirce, in his "Polity of the Wesleyan Methodists," remarks that, in the year 1782 the trustees of the chapel at Birstal, in Yorkshire, manifested a want of confidence in Mr. Wesley and the Conference, and they desired to choose preachers in connection with the body, but were not willing to submit to the appointment made by the Conference. In this demand they were the more positive as the settlement of their chapel was not in accordance with the Methodist plan.[2] The inquiry, therefore, was made in the Conference of that year: 'What can be done in regard to the preaching-house at Birstal?'"[3]

The answer given at the Conference was short sharp, and decisive. The reply was: "If the trustees still refuse to settle it on the Methodist plan; if they still insist that they will have the right of placing and displacing the preachers at their pleasure,—then, First, let a plain statement of the case be drawn up. Secondly, let a collection be made throughout all England in order to purchase ground, and

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., The Case of the Birstal House, Vol. VII, p. 327.

[2] Myles, Chronological History of the Methodists, p. 10.

[3] Peirce, Polity of Wesleyan Methodists, 3d Ed., p. 594.

build another preaching-house as near the present as may be."[1]

The original Birstal deed was quite a curiosity in its way. It gave the two Wesleys in succession, and then to Grimshaw, the right of occupying the pulpit; but after the decease of these three ministers the trustees were to elect their own preachers *monthly;* and all such preachers, so long as they continued in this office, were to preach in the chapel twice every Sunday, every Christmas-day, New Year's-day, and Good Friday, and also every Thursday night, as had been up to 1751, "usual and customary to be done."[2]

The new deed of 1782 gave the right of appointment to John and Charles Wesley during their life-time; but after their death the appointment of preachers was to be made by the trustees and certain persons who had been class-leaders for three years, and the preachers so selected were to hold said premises and exercise the function of a preacher only during the good-will and pleasure of the major part of the aforesaid trustees and class-leaders.[3]

The latter deed was widely different from the former, and, as the vice-chancellor ruled in 1854, so far as it purported to vary the trusts of the deed of 1751, it was void and of no effect.[4]

Wesley doubtless saw he had been worried into a

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, p. 327; Minutes 1782, Vol. I, p. 157; Peirce, Wesleyan Polity, p. 594.

[2] Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 373.

[3] Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III p. 374.

[4] Methodist Magazine, 1854, p. 184; Tyerman, Life of Wesley, Vol. III, p. 375.

mistake in signing the deed, which he did May 14, 1782; but, though almost seventy-nine years old, he was acute enough to see that it was still necessary for his brother Charles to join in the conveyance; so on the 28th of May, 1782, he wrote to his brother, suggesting that he write assuring the parties that he would sign if the chapel were settled on the Methodist plan, but not otherwise. Charles acted on his brother's suggestion, refusing to sign the deed.

Mr. Wesley was determined to maintain discipline, and on June 18, 1782, he addressed Mr. Valton, one of the Birstal preachers, the following note:

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—I can not allow J—— S—— to be any longer a leader; and if he will lead the class whether I will or no, I require you to put him out of our society. If twenty of his class will leave the society too, they must. The first loss is the best. Better forty members should be lost than our discipline be lost. *They are no Methodists that will bear no restraints.* Explain this at large to the society."[1]

Thus the affair stood when the Conference met in August, 1782, when the Conference took the action already mentioned. At the same Conference Dr. Coke was appointed to visit the societies throughout England, so far as necessary, in order to have all the preaching-houses settled on the Conference plan, and the respective assistants were requested to give him all the support in their power.[2]

Dr. Coke very promptly took up the Birstal case. He wrote to one of the trustees, and shortly

[1] Methodist Magazine, 1824, p. 307; Tyerman, Life of John Wesley Vol. III, p. 383.

[2] Peirce, Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed. p. 594.

after published a 12mo tract of twelve pages, entitled "An Address to the Inhabitants of Birstal and the Adjacent Villages," in which he relates how the attorney of the trustees secured Wesley's signature to the deed, tells that the "amazing deed" had been discussed and had created alarm in the recent Conference, and that he had been delegated to carry into execution the minute which had been passed.[1]

The idea of housing the Birstal society in a new chapel to be built close to the other, and leaving the trustees with an empty building, was unique and heroic; but Mr. Wesley was determined. So he writes to Samuel Bradburn, then stationed at Bradford: "Birstal is a leading case, the first of an avowed violation of our plan. Therefore the point must be carried for the Methodist preachers now or never; and I alone can carry it,—which I will, God being my helper."[2]

Wesley in his paper on "The Case of Birstal House," issued January 3, 1783, argues with great vehemence against such a deed and against such power in trustees. Thus he says:

"Because, whenever the trustees exert their power of 'placing and displacing preachers,' then,—

"1. Itinerant preaching is no more. When the trustees in any place have found and fixed a preacher they like, the rotation of preachers is at an end; at least, till they are tired of their favorite preacher, and so turn him out.

"2. While he stays, is not the bridle in his mouth? How dares he speak the full and the whole truth, since, whenever

[1] Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 379.
[2] Wesley's Works, Eng. Ed., Vol. XII, p. 138.

he displeases the trustees, he is liable to lose his bread? How much less will he dare to put a trustee, though ever so ungodly, out of the society! . . .

"4. The power of the trustees is greater than that of any nobleman; yea, or of the king himself. Where he is patron he can put in a preacher, but he can not put him out. . . . I am not pleading my own cause. . . . I am pleading for Mr. Taylor, Mr. Bradburn, Mr. Benson, and for every other traveling preacher, that you may be as free, after I am gone hence, as you are now I am at your head; that you may never be liable to be turned out of any or all of our houses without any reason given, but that so is the pleasure of twenty or thirty men. . . .

"I insist upon that point, and let everything else go. No Methodist trustees, if I can help it, shall, after my death, any more than while I live, have the power of placing and displacing the preachers."[1]

Dr. Coke went so far as to purchase a piece of ground on which to erect a new and properly deeded chapel; but after considerable parleying, a compromise was made, and the matter amicably adjusted, the trustees executing a new deed, which gave the Conference power to appoint the preachers.[2]

The discussion and the result probably had a salutary effect in preserving uniformity; but the other question—namely, the title of the Conference to the use of the chapels after the death of Mr. Wesley—continued to give the preachers great uneasiness.

"They were safe during his life, as the various deeds specified that he, by name, should appoint the preachers from time to time. The generality of those deeds specified also, that, after his death, the Confer-

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed, Vol. VII, p. 328.

[2] See Tyerman's Wesley, pp. 373-382; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, p. 594.

ence of the people called Methodists should appoint preachers in like manner. Some of the deeds had no reference to any posthumous appointment, and so would have been completely in the power of the trustees at Mr. Wesley's decease. Several, even, of those trustees where the chapels were settled according to the Methodist plan did not scruple to say 'that the Conference was not an assembly that the law would recognize, and that, therefore, they would, after Mr. Wesley's death, appoint whom they should think proper.' One of these said to me, 'They might appoint a popish priest if they should think it proper.'"[1]

Dr. Coke, as well as others, soon saw that what was needed was a legal description or definition of the phrase, "The Conference of the people called Methodists," which appeared in the regularly drawn deeds. Without a legal definition of the term Conference, made before the death of Mr. Wesley, his decease would throw British Methodism into a chaotic condition. Wesley was almost eighty, and no time should be lost.

Dr. Coke thus tells the story of the effort which immediately grew out of the excitement of 1782:

"In the Conference held in the year 1782 several complaints were made in respect to the danger in which we were situated from the want of specifying, in distinct and legal terms, what was meant by the term, 'The Conference of the people called Methodists.' Indeed, the preachers seemed universally alarmed, and many expressed their fears that divisions would take place among us after the death of Mr. Wesley on

[1] Rev. Henry Moore, Life of John Wesley, Amer. Ed., Vol. II, p. 246.

this account; and the whole body of preachers present seemed to wish that some methods might be taken to remove this danger, which appeared to be pregnant with evils of the first magnitude.

"In consequence of this (the subject lying heavy on my heart), I desired Mr. Clulow, of Chancery Lane, London, to draw up such a case as I judged sufficient, and then to present it to that very eminent counselor, Mr. Maddocks, for his opinion. This was accordingly done, and Mr. Maddocks informed us, in his answer, that the deeds of our preaching-houses were in the situation we dreaded; that the law would not recognize the Conference in the state in which it stood at that time, and, consequently, that there was no central point which might preserve the connection from splitting into a thousand pieces after the death of Mr. Wesley. To prevent this, he observed that Mr. Wesley should enroll a deed in chancery, which deed should specify the persons by name who composed the Conference, together with the mode of succession for its perpetuity; and at the same time such regulations be established by the deed as Mr. Wesley would wish the Conference should be governed by, after his death.

"This opinion of Mr. Maddocks I read in the Conference of 1783. The whole Conference seemed grateful to me for procuring the opinion, and expressed their wishes that such a deed might be drawn up and executed by Mr. Wesley as should agree with the advice of that great lawyer, as soon as possible."[1]

The following is the case submitted to the barrister, Mr. Maddocks, and his opinion upon it:

"Your opinion is requested.

"Will the general description in the 'Deeds of the yearly Conferences of the People called Methodists, in London,' etc., together with the constant usage before mentioned, be sufficient marks of identity, personal and legal description, of the very persons who actually do compose the Conference, as to carry the exercise of the trust fully into them, and safely through them into their appointees, so effectually as to enable

[1] Drew's Life of Coke, Amer. Ed., pp. 47, 48.

such appointees to maintain and enforce their right to the benefit of the trusts in case of resistance on the part of the trustees, or any other persons? If not, what means would you advise to be taken for the aforesaid purposes?

"Answer:

"As to the means of fixing the sense of the word *Conference*, and defining what persons are to be members of the Conference, and how the body is to be continued in succession, and to identify it, I think Mr. John Wesley should prepare and subscribe a declaration for that purpose, to be enrolled in the Court of Chancery for safe custody, naming the present members, and prescribing the mode of election to fill vacancies, and making the minutes or memorials of their proceedings, signed by their secretary, evidence of such elections, to which declaration of Mr. Wesley, so enrolled, all the trust deeds should refer. JOHN MADDOCKS.

"*Lincoln's Inn, December 5, 1783.*"[1]

Dr. Coke thus narrates his further connection with the affair:

"Soon after the Conference was ended, Mr. Wesley authorized me to draw up, with the assistance of Mr. Clulow, all the leading parts of a deed, which should answer the above-mentioned purposes. This we did with much care, and, as for myself, I can truly say with fear and trembling, receiving Mr. Maddocks's advice in respect to every step we took, and laying the whole ultimately at Mr. Wesley's feet for his approbation, there remained now nothing but to insert the names of those who were to constitute the Conference."[2]

The result was, that Mr. Wesley, after making a thorough examination of the case under the best legal advice, signed a formal document in which he named one hundred ministers and preachers who should constitute the legal Conference.

---

[1] Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., pp. 22, 23.
[2] Drew's Life of Coke, Amer. Ed., p. 48.

This document is known as the "Deed of Declaration," called in legal phraseology, a "Deed Poll," to indicate that it is made by one party only, in contradistinction to an "Indenture," which is a deed between two or more parties; the paper or parchment in the former case being polled or shaved even, while in the latter the edges were indented for identification and security.

The following is the celebrated Deed of Declaration in question:

MR. WESLEY'S DEED OF DECLARATION.

Enrolled in His Majesty's High Court of Chancery.

To all to Whom These Presents Shall Come, *JOHN WESLEY, Late of Lincoln College, Oxford, but Now of the City Road, London, Clerk, Sendeth Greeting:*

"Whereas divers buildings, commonly called chapels, with a messuage and dwelling-house, or other appurtenances, to each of the same belonging, situate in various parts of Great Britain, have been given and conveyed, from time to time, by the same John Wesley, to certain persons and their heirs, in each of the said gifts and conveyances named, which are enrolled in his majesty's High Court of Chancery, upon the acknowledgment of the said John Wesley (pursuant to the Act of Parliament in that case made and provided); upon trust, that the trustees in the said several deeds respectively named, and the survivors of them, and their heirs and assigns, and the trustees for the time being, to be elected as in the said deeds is appointed, should permit and suffer the said John Wesley, and such other person and persons as he should for that purpose from time to time nominate and appoint, at all times during his life, at his will and pleasure to have and enjoy the free use and benefit of the said premises, that he, the said John Wesley, and such person and persons as he should nominate and appoint, might therein preach and expound God's Holy Word; and, upon further trust, that the said respective trustees, and the sur-

vivors of them, and their heirs and assigns, and the trustees for the time being, should permit and suffer Charles Wesley, brother of the said John Wesley, and such other person and persons as the said Charles Wesley should for that purpose from time to time nominate and appoint, in like manner during his life, to have, use, and enjoy the said premises respectively, for the like purposes aforesaid, and after the decease of the survivor of them, the said John Wesley and Charles Wesley, then, upon further trust, that the said respective trustees, and the survivors of them, and their heirs and assigns, and the trustees for the time being forever, should permit and suffer such person and persons, and for such time and times, as should be appointed at the yearly Conference of the people called Methodists, in London, Bristol, or Leeds, and no others, to have and enjoy the said premises for the purposes aforesaid; and whereas divers persons have, in like manner, given or conveyed many chapels, with messuages and dwelling houses, or other appurtenances, to the same belonging, situate in various parts of Great Britain and also in Ireland, to certain trustees, in each of the said gifts and conveyances respectively named, upon the like trusts, and for the same uses and purposes aforesaid (except only that in some of the said gifts and conveyances, no life estate or other interest is therein or thereby given and reserved to the said Charles Wesley); and whereas, for rendering effectual the trusts created by the said several gifts or conveyances, and that no doubt or litigation may arise with respect unto the same, or the interpretation and true meaning thereof, it has been thought expedient by the said John Wesley, on behalf of himself as donor of the several chapels, with the messuages, dwelling-houses, or appurtenances before mentioned, as if the donors of the said other chapels, with the messuages, dwelling-houses or appurtenances, to the same belonging, given or conveyed to the like uses or trusts, to explain the words 'Yearly Conference of the People called Methodists' contained in all the said trust deeds, and to declare what persons are members of the said Conference, and how the succession and identity thereof is to be continued.

"Now, therefore, these presents witness, that, for accomplishing the aforesaid purposes, the said John Wesley doth hereby declare that the Conference of the people called Meth-

odists, in London, Bristol, or Leeds, ever since there hath been any Yearly Conference of the said People called Methodists, in any of the said places, hath always heretofore consisted of the preachers and expounders of God's Holy Word, commonly called Methodist preachers, in connection with, and under the care of, the said John Wesley, whom he hath thought expedient year after year to summon to meet him, in one or other of the said places, of London, Bristol, or Leeds, to advise with them for the promotion of the gospel of Christ, to appoint the said persons so summoned, and the other preachers and expounders of God's Holy Word, also in connection with, and under the care of, the said John Wesley, not summoned to the said yearly Conference, to the use and enjoyment of the said chapels and premises so given and conveyed upon trust for the said John Wesley and such other person and persons as he should appoint during his life as aforesaid, and for the expulsion of unworthy and admission of new persons under his care, and into his connection, to be preachers and expounders as aforesaid, and also of other persons upon trial for the like purposes; the names of all which persons so summoned by the said John Wesley, the persons appointed, with the chapels and premises to which they were so appointed, together with the duration of such appointments, and of those expelled or admitted into connection or upon trial with all other matters transacted and done at the said yearly Conference, have year by year, been printed and published under the title of 'Minutes of Conference.'

"And these presents further witness, and the said John Wesley doth hereby avouch and further declare, that the several persons hereinafter named; to-wit, the said John Wesley and Charles Wesley; Thomas Coke, of the city of London, Doctor of Civil Law; James Creighton, of the same place, clerk; Thomas Tennant, of the same place; Thomas Rankin, of the same place; Joshua Keighley, of Sevenoaks, in the county of Kent; John Booth, of Colchester; Thomas Cooper, of the same place; Richard Whatcoat, of Norwich; Jeremiah Brettel, of Lynn, in the county of Norfolk; Jonathan Parkin, of the same place; Joseph Pescod, of Bedford; Christopher Watkins, of Northampton; John Barber, of the same place; John Broadbent, of Oxford; Joseph Cole, of the same place;

Jonathan Cousins, of the city of Gloucester; John Brettel, of the same place; John Mason, of Salisbury; George Story, of the same place; Francis Wrigley, of St. Austle, in the county of Cornwall; William Green, of the city of Bristol; John Moon, of Plymouth Dock; James Hall, of the same place; James Thorn, of St. Austle, aforesaid; Joseph Taylor, of Redruth, in the said county of Cornwall; William Hoskins, of Cardiff, Glamorganshire; John Leech, of Brecon; William Saunders, of the same place; Richard Rodda, of Birmingham; John Fenwick, of Burslem, Staffordshire; Thomas Hanby, of the same place; James Rogers, of Macclesfield; Samuel Bardsley, of the same place; John Murlin, of Manchester; William Percival, of the same place; Duncan Wright, of the city of Chester; John Goodwin, of the same place; Parson Greenwood, of Liverpool; Zechariah Udall, of the same place; Thomas Va ey, of the same place; Joseph Bradford, of Leicester; Jeremiah Robertshaw, of the same place; William Myles, of Nottingham; Thomas Longley, of Derby; Thomas Taylor, of Sheffield; William Simpson, of the same place; Thomas Carlill, of Grimsby, in the county of Lincoln; Robert Scott, of the same place; Joseph Harper, of the same place; Thomas Corbit, of Gainsborough, in the county of Lincoln; James Ray, of the same place; William Thompson, of Leeds, in the county of York; Robert Roberts, of the same place; Samuel Bradburn, of the same place; John Valton, of Birstal, in the said county; John Allen, of the same place; Isaac Brown, of the same place; Thomas Hanson, of Huddersfield, in the said county; John Shaw, of the same place; Alexander Mather, of Bradford, in the said county; Joseph Benson, of Halifax, in the said county; William Dufton, of the same place; Benjamin Rhodes, of Keighley, in the said county; John Easton, of Colne, in the county of Lancaster; Robert Costerdine, of the same place; Jasper Robinson, of the Isle of Man; George Button, of the same place; John Pawson, of the city of York; Edward Jackson, of Hull; Charles Atmore, of the said city of York; Lancelot Harrison, of Scarborough; George Shadford of Hull aforesaid; Barnabas Thomas, of the same place; Thomas Briscoe, of Yarm, in the said county of York; Christopher Peacock, of the same place; William Thom, of Whitby, in the said county of York; Robert Hopkins, of the same place; John Pea-

cock, of Barnard Castle; William Collins, of Sunderland; Thomas Dixon, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; Christopher Hopper, of the same place; William Boothby, of the same place; William Hunter, of Berwick-upon-Tweed; Joseph Saunderson, of Dundee, Scotland; William Warrener, of the same place; Duncan M'Allum, of Aberdeen, Scotland; Thomas Rutherford, of the city of Dublin, in the kingdom of Ireland; Daniel Jackson, of the same place; Henry Moore, of the city of Cork, Ireland; Andrew Blair, of the same place; Richard Watkinson, of Limerick, Ireland; Nehemiah Price, of Athlone, Ireland; Robert Lindsay, of Sligo, Ireland; George Brown, of Clones, Ireland; Thomas Barber, of Charlemont, Ireland; Henry Foster, of Belfast, Ireland; and John Crook, of Lisburne, Ireland, gentlemen—being preachers and expounders of God's Holy Word, under the care and in connection with the said John Wesley, have been, and now are and do, on the day of the date hereof, constitute the members of the said Conference, according to the true intent and meaning of the said several gifts and conveyances wherein the words, 'Conference of the people called Methodists,' are mentioned and contained; and that the said several persons before-named, and their successors forever, to be chosen as hereafter mentioned, are and shall forever be construed, taken, and be the Conference of the people called Methodists. Nevertheless, upon the terms and subject to the regulations hereinafter prescribed; that is to say,

"First. That the members of the said Conference and their successors, for the time being forever, shall assemble once in every year, at London, Bristol, or Leeds (except as after mentioned), for the purposes aforesaid; and the time and place of holding every subsequent Conference shall be appointed at the preceding one, save that the next Conference after the date hereof shall be holden at Leeds, in Yorkshire, the last Tuesday in July next.

"Second. The act of the majority in number of the Conference assembled as aforesaid shall be had, taken, and be the act of the whole Conference to all intents, purposes, and constructions whatsoever.

"Third. That after the Conference shall be assembled as aforesaid, they shall first proceed to fill up all the vacancies occasioned by death or absence, as after mentioned.

"Fourth. No act of the Conference assembled as aforesaid shall be had, taken, or be the act of the Conference until forty of the members thereof are assembled, unless reduced under that number by death since the prior Conference, or absence as after mentioned, nor until all the vacancies occasioned by death or absence shall be filled up by the election of new members of the Conference, so as to make up the number one hundred, unless there be not a sufficient number of persons objects of such election; and during the assembly of the Conference, there shall always be forty members present at the doing of any act, save as aforesaid, or otherwise such act shall be void.

"Fifth. The duration of the yearly assembly of the Conference shall not be less than five days, nor more than three weeks, and be concluded by the appointment of the Conference, if under twenty-one days; or, otherwise, the conclusion thereof shall follow, of course, at the end of the said twenty-one days; the whole of all which said time of the assembly of the Conference shall be had, taken, considered, and be the yearly Conference of the people called Methodists; and all acts of the Conference, during such yearly assembly thereof, shall be the acts of the Conference, and none other.

"Sixth. Immediately after all the vacancies occasioned by death or absence are filled up by the election of new members, as aforesaid, the Conference shall choose a president and secretary of their assembly out of themselves, who shall continne such until the election of another president or secretary in the next or other subsequent Conference; and the said president shall have the privilege and power of two members in all acts of the Conference during his presidency, and such other powers, privileges, and authorities as the Conference shall from time to time see fit to intrust into his hands.

"Seventh. Any member of the Conference absenting himself from the yearly assembly thereof for two years successively, without the consent of or dispensation of the Conference, and be not present on the first day of the third yearly assembly thereof, at the time and place appointed for the holding of the same, shall cease to be a member of the Conference from and after the said first day of the said third yearly assembly thereof, to all intents and purposes, as though

he were naturally dead. But the Conference shall and may dispense with, or consent to the absence of any member from any of the said yearly assemblies for any cause which the said Conference may see fit or necessary; and such member, whose absence shall be so dispensed with or consented to by the Conference, shall not, by such absence, cease to be a member thereof.

"Eighth. The Conference shall and may expel and put out from being a member thereof, or from being in connection therewith, or from being upon trial, any person, member of the Conference, or admitted into connection or upon trial, for any cause which to the Conference may seem fit or necessary; and every member of the Conference so expelled and put out shall cease to be a member thereof, to all intents and purposes, as though he was naturally dead. And the Conference, immediately after the expulsion of any member thereof as aforesaid, shall elect another person to be a member of the Conference in the stead of such member so expelled.

"Ninth. The Conference shall and may admit into connection with them, or upon trial, any person or persons whom they shall approve to be preachers and expounders of God's Holy Word, under the care and direction of the Conference; the name of every such person or persons so admitted into connection or upon trial, as aforesaid, with the time and degrees of the admission, being entered in the Journals or Minutes of the Conference.

"Tenth. No person shall be elected a member of the Conference who hath not been admitted into connection with the Conference, as a preacher and expounder of God's Holy Word, as aforesaid, for twelve months.

"Eleventh. The Conference shall not, nor may, nominate or appoint any person to the use and enjoyment of, or to preach and expound God's Holy Word, in any of the chapels and premises so given or conveyed, or which may be given or conveyed, upon the trusts aforesaid, who is not either a member of the Conference, or admitted into connection with the same, or upon trial, as aforesaid; nor appoint any person for more than three years successively to the use and enjoyment of any chapel and premises already given, or to be given or conveyed upon the trusts aforesaid, except ordained ministers of the Church of England.

"Twelfth. That the Conference shall and may appoint the place of holding the early assembly thereof at any other city, town, or place than London, Bristol, or Leeds, when it shall seem expedient so to do.

"Thirteenth. And for the convenience of the chapels and premises already, or which may hereafter be given or conveyed upon the trusts aforesaid, situate in Ireland or other parts out of the Kingdom of Great Britain, the Conference shall and may, when and as often as it shall seem expedient, but not otherwise, appoint and delegate any member or members of the Conference with all or any of the powers, privileges, and advantages, herein before contained or vested in the Conference; and all and every the acts, admissions, expulsions, and appointments whatsoever of such member or members of the Conference, so appointed and delegated as aforesaid, the same being put into writing and signed by such delegate or delegates, and entered into the Journals or Minutes of the Conference, and subscribed as after mentioned, shall be deemed, taken, and be the acts, admissions, expulsions, and appointments of the Conference to all intents, constructions, and purposes whatsoever, from the respective times when the same shall be done by such delegate or delegates, notwithstanding anything herein contained to the contrary.

"Fourteenth. All resolutions and orders touching elections, admissions, expulsions, consents, dispensations, delegations, or appointments and acts whatsoever of the Conference, shall be entered and written in the Journals or Minutes of the Conference, which shall be kept for that purpose, publicly read, and then subscribed by the president and secretary thereof for the time being, during the time such Conference shall be assembled; and when so entered and subscribed, shall be had, taken, received, and be the acts of the Conference, and such entry and subscription as aforesaid shall be had, taken, received, and be evidence of all and every such acts of the said Conference, and of their said delegates, without the aid of any other proof; and whatever shall not be so entered and subscribed as aforesaid, shall not be had, taken, received, or be the act of the Conference; and the said president and secretary are hereby required and obliged to enter and subscribe, as aforesaid, every act whatever of the Conference.

"Lastly. Whenever the said Conference shall be reduced under the number of forty members, and continue so reduced for three yearly assemblies thereof, successively, or whenever the members thereof shall decline or neglect to meet together annually for the purposes aforesaid during the space of three years, that then, and in either of the said events, the Conference of the people called Methodists shall be extinguished, and all the aforesaid powers, privileges, and advantages shall cease, and the said chapels and premises and all other chapels and premises, which now are or hereafter may be settled, given, or conveyed upon the trust aforesaid, shall vest in the trustees for the time being of the said chapels and premises respectively, and their successors forever; upon trust, that they and the survivors of them, and the trustees for the time being do, shall, and may appoint such person and persons to preach and expound God's Holy Word therein, and to have the use and enjoyment thereof, for such time and in such manner as to them shall seem proper:

"*Provided*, always, that nothing herein contained shall extend or be construed to extend, to extinguish, lessen, or abridge the life estate of the said John Wesley and Charles Wesley, or either of them, of, and in, any of the said chapels and premises, or any other chapels and premises wherein they, the said John Wesley and Charles Wesley, or either of them, now have, or may have, any estate or interest, power, or authority whatsoever.

"*In Witness Whereof*, the said John Wesley hath hereunto set his hand and seal the twenty-eighth day of February, in the twenty-fourth year of the reign of our sovereign lord, George the Third, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, and so forth, and in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four. JOHN WESLEY.

"Sealed and delivered (being first duly stamped) in the presence of }

"WILLIAM CLULOW, Quality Court, Chancery Lane, London.

"RICHARD YOUNG, clerk to the said William Clulow.

"Taken and acknowledged by the Rev. John Wesley, party thereto, this 28th of February, 1784, at the public office, before me, EDWARD MONTAGU.

"The above is a true copy of the original Deed (which is enrolled in Chancery) and was therewith examined by us.

"WILLIAM CLULOW.
"RICHARD YOUNG.

"ENDORSEMENT.

"Dated Feb. 28th, 1784.

"CLULOW.

"The Rev. John Wesley's Declaration and Appointment of the Conference of the people called Methodists, enrolled in His Majesty's High Court of Chancery, the ninth day of March, in the year of our Lord 1784, being first duly stamped according to the tenor of the statutes made for that purpose.

"THOMAS BRIGSTOCK."[1]

This legal instrument has been called the "Magna Charta of Methodism." Certainly it was the Magna Charta of British Methodism; and, though various attempts have been made to set it aside, its validity has been confirmed by the highest judicial authorities.[2] It gave a legal definition of the term "the Conference of the People called Methodists," and so secured title to the chapel property, and prevented British Methodism being broken up into isolated congregational Churches, which might have had only an ephemeral existence.

Dr. Beecham, in his essay on the "Constitution of Methodism," states that "its object was to give such a legal specification of the Conference as would ever secure for that assembly, in the exercise of its right of appointing preachers to the chapels, the protection of the law of the land." But its effect was even more than this; for it gave the Conference a

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. IV, pp. 753-759.
[2] Pierce's Eccl. Principles and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism, p. 21.

legal existence, and also endowed it with the supreme power which had been centered in Mr. Wesley. By this act the Rev. John Wesley transferred to the Conference of Methodist ministers supreme legislative, judicial, and executive authority over both preachers and people called Methodists. The deed made it necessary for the Conference to meet annually, and made the vote of the majority the act of the whole Conference. It also provided for the filling of vacancies, and specified other points essential to the continuance of the Conference.

The Conference did not assume this power until the decease of Mr. Wesley; but it marked an era in British Methodism when, for the first time, this declaration of power in the Conference, and this recognition of the right and power to determine questions by a majority vote, was enrolled in the High Court of Chancery, as was done in London, on the 28th day of February, in the year of our Lord 1784.

Dr. Coke promptly sent copies of the Deed of Declaration to the principal preachers on the circuits. Probably he did this on his own notion, for he writes: "All things necessary being completed in the Court of Chancery according to law, I thought it my duty to send copies of the deed to all assistants of circuits throughout Great Britain, and I afterward carried copies of it to Ireland."[1]

There was one point in the deed, however, which soon provoked criticism, and that was the part which

[1] Drew's Life of Coke, Amer. Ed., pp. 48, 49.

recited that one hundred preachers should be the legal Conference. At once those who were not named feared that the "legal hundred" would take advantage of them.

One who came in for his share of blame was Dr. Coke,[1] probably because of the activity he had shown in securing the deed, and also because of the confidence reposed in him by Mr. Wesley. Dr. Coke, however, disclaimed any responsibility for the limited number. As already cited, Dr. Coke left the deed with Mr. Wesley in such a state of completion that "there remained now nothing but to insert the names of those who were to constitute the Conference." Then Dr. Coke relates that "Mr. Wesley then declared that he would limit the number to one hundred. This was, indeed, contrary to my very humble opinion, which was that every preacher in full connection should be a member of the Conference, and that admission into full connection should be looked upon as admission into full membership with the Conference; and I still believe it will be most for the glory of God and the peace of our Zion that the members of the Conference admit the other preachers who are in full connection, and are present at the Conference from time to time, to a full vote on all occasions. However, of course, I submitted to the superior judgment and authority of Wesley. But I do publicly avow that I was not concerned in the limitation of the number or the selection of the hundred preach-

[1] Rev. Henry Moore, Life of John Wesley, Vol. II, p. 249.

ers who were nominated the members of the Conference."[1]

There is no doubt that Dr. Coke accurately stated the case; for when, at the first Conference after the deed was enrolled, some of the preachers asserted that it was the work of Dr. Coke, "Mr. Wesley only replied to this in the words of Virgil: *Non vult, non potuit*—'He had neither the will nor the power.'"[2] Dr. Coke appears to have had much to do with securing the legal opinion, and suggesting points to be recited in the deed, but there is no evidence that he had anything to do with limiting the number to one hundred or naming the hundred.

Individuals here and there expressed themselves with considerable vehemence against the naming of only one hundred, when there were one hundred and ninety-two preachers altogether; and some maintained that there was lack of equity in the selection, for the names of some of the senior and respectable preachers had been omitted, and the names of younger men were inserted.

Naturally, those who were not named in the deed were exceedingly grieved, and expressed their feelings in various ways.[3] This serious crisis passed without any other immediate consequences than the retirement of the five principal opponents of the limitation

---

[1] Coke's Address to the Methodist Society in Great Britain and Ireland on the Settlement of the Preaching-houses, in Drew's Life of Coke, Amer. Ed., p. 48.

[2] Rev. Henry Moore, Life of John Wesley, Vol. II, p. 249.

[3] Pawson's MS. Memoir of Whitehead; Hampson's Life of John Wesley, 1791; Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, pp. 422-424.

to one hundred; namely, John Hampson, Sr.; his son, John Hampson, Jr.; John Atlay, Joseph Pilmoor, and William Eels, who had been in the Methodist ministry thirty-one, six, twenty-one, nineteen, and twelve years respectively, but whose names had not been mentioned in the deed.[1] Mr. Fletcher's friendly efforts effected a temporary reconciliation, but it was of short duration; and it is supposed that out of this matter of the deed grew the apparent bitterness manifested, in some instances, in Hampson's "Memoirs of John Wesley," and also some of the peculiarities of Whitehead's "Life of Wesley."[2]

An incident which occurred about this time led Mr. Wesley to make a full statement of the whole affair.

At Plymouth Dock, William Moore had renounced the Methodists and had secured a preaching-place of his own, taking with him about forty members of the old society. In view of this, Mr. Wesley was urged to visit the place at once, which he did with great promptness, reaching there on the 2d of March, 1785, and on the evening of the 3d he says: "I read to the whole congregation a plain statement of the case, with regard to the 'Deed of Declaration,' which William Moore had so wonderfully misrepresented; and I believe they were all fully satisfied."[3] This evidently was the paper afterward published under

[1] Tyerman's Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, pp. 422, 423; Whitehead's Life of John Wesley, Jones's Dublin Ed., pp. 398, 399.

[2] Whitehead's Wesley, Dublin Ed., Vol. II, pp. 398, 399; Henry Moore, Life of Wesley, Vol. II, pp. 248, 249.

[3] Wesley's Journal, Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. IV, p. 608.

the title, "Thoughts upon Some Late Occurrences," and dated Plymouth Dock, March 3, 1785, part of which we have already quoted in another connection.

In this statement he explains the origin and nature of the Conferences which he had called together annually, showing that all power was lodged in himself, and that the Conference, called at his pleasure, was simply invited to confer with him. Continuing, he says:

"Some years after it was agreed that, after the decease of my brother and me, the preachers should be stationed by the Conference. But erelong a question arose: What does that term mean? Who are the Conference? It appeared difficult to define the term. And the year before last, all our brethren who were met at Bristol desired me to fix the determinate meaning of the word.

"Hitherto it had meant, not the whole body of traveling preachers (it never bore that meaning at all), but those persons whom I invited yearly to confer with me. But to this there was a palpable objection—such a Conference would have no being after my death. And what other definition of it to give, I knew not; at least, I knew none that would stand good in law. I consulted a skillful and honest attorney, and he consulted an eminent counselor, who answered: 'There is no way of doing this but by naming a determinate number of persons. The deed which names these must be enrolled in chancery; then it will stand good in law.'

"My first thought was to name a very few, suppose ten or twelve persons. Count Zinzendorf named only six, who were to preside over the community after his decease. But, on second thoughts, I believed there would be more safety in a greater number of counselors, and therefore named a hundred—as many as I judged could meet without too great an expense, and without leaving any circuit naked of preachers while the Conference met.

"In naming these preachers, as I had no adviser, so I had no respect of persons; but I simply set down those that, according to the best of my judgment, were most proper. But I am not infallible. I might mistake, and think better of some of them than they deserved. However, I did my best; and if I did wrong it was not the error of my will, but of my judgment.

"This was the rise and this is the nature of that famous 'Deed of Declaration'—that vile, wicked deed!—concerning which you have heard such an outcry. And now, can any one tell me how to mend it, or how it could have been made better? 'O yes, you might have inserted two hundred, as well as one hundred preachers.' No, for then the expense of meeting would have been double, and all the circuits would have been without preachers. 'But you might have named other preachers instead of these.' True, if I had thought as well of them as they did of themselves. But I did not; therefore I could do no otherwise than I did, without sinning against God and my own conscience.

"'But what need was there for any deed at all?' There was the utmost need of it. Without some authentic deed fixing the meaning of the term, the moment I died the Conference had been nothing. Therefore any of the proprietors of the land on which our preaching-houses were built might have seized them for their own use, and there would have been none to hinder them; for the Conference would have been nobody—a mere empty name.

"You see, then, in all the pains I have taken about this absolutely necessary deed I have been laboring, not for myself (I have no interest therein), but for the whole body of Methodists, in order to fix them upon such a foundation as is likely to stand as long as the sun and moon endure. That is, if they continue to walk by faith, and to show forth their faith by their works; otherwise I pray God to root out the memorial of them from the earth."[1]

It is quite probable that Mr. Wesley had not much faith in the governing power of the promis-

[1] "Thoughts upon Some Late Occurrences," Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, pp. 309, 310.

cuous mass, and preferred to trust the wisdom of a smaller number of the ablest and most intelligent; but whatever may be thought of his views in the abstract, it must be admitted that he had made great advances towards a more democratic government.

According to the plan proposed in 1769 the proposition was, that after his death the Conference should elect "a committee of three, five, or seven," in whom should be vested the same power which Mr. Wesley had possessed. Count Zinzendorf, in the case of the Moravians, named only six. Mr. Wesley, therefore, made a great advance on his own ideas, and a great improvement on the example of Zinzendorf, when he named one hundred persons to constitute the legal Conference, among whom was to be diffused the supreme power which he had exerted.

Our instincts and training to-day would lead us to believe that it would have been wiser for Mr. Wesley to have included the name of every preacher in full connection, but at the same time we must feel that there is force in his explanation. To have inserted all would have made a long list of names, and, as Moore says, "There never had been so great a number [as one hundred] at any Conference, and generally from twenty to thirty less, the number so fixed would not, it was thought, have excited either surprise or displeasure."[1]

It was a crisis in the history of British Methodism, but it was passed with comparative safety. Mr. Wesley himself never intended any injustice to the

[1] Rev. Henry Moore, Life of John Wesley, Vol. II, p. 250.

ministers who were not named in the deed, and was anxious to prevent any possible injury to them; so as early as April, 1785, he wrote the following letter, which he placed in the hands of one of the preachers—Mr. Joseph Bradford—with instruction to deliver it to the Conference at the first session immediately after his decease:

"CHESTER, April 7, 1785.

"*To the Methodist Conference:*

"MY DEAR BRETHREN,—Some of our traveling preachers have expressed a fear that, after my decease, you would exclude them either from preaching in connection with you or from some other privileges which they now enjoy. I know no other way to prevent any such inconvenience than to leave these, my last words, with you. I beseech you by the mercies of God, that you never avail yourselves of the Deed of Declaration to assume any superiority over your brethren, but let all things go on among those itinerants who choose to remain together, exactly in the same manner as when I was with you, so far as circumstances will permit. In particular, I beseech you, if you ever loved me, and if you now love God and your brethren, to have no respect of persons in stationing the preachers, in choosing children for Kingswood School, in disposing of the yearly contribution and the preachers' fund, or any other public money. But do all things with a single eye, as I have done from the beginning. Go on thus, doing all things without prejudice or partiality, and God will be with you even to the end. JOHN WESLEY."[1]

Of course, as long as Mr. Wesley lived the contents of this paternal letter were private.

At the Conference of 1785, in order to quiet the uneasiness and to defend Mr. Wesley, all the preachers who were present signed the following declarations of

[1] Minutes 1791, Vol I, pp. 242, 243; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., pp. 81, 82; Wm. Myles, Hist. of Methodists, London, 3d Ed. 1803, pp. 197, 198.

their approval of the substance and design of the Deed of Declaration:

"LONDON, July 3, 1785.

"We, whose names are under written, do declare that Mr. Wesley was desired at the last Bristol Conference, without a dissentient voice, to draw up a deed which should give a legal specification of the phrase 'The Conference of the People called Methodists;' and that the mode of doing it was entirely left to his judgment and discretion.

"And we do also declare that we do approve of the substance and design of the deed which Mr. Wesley has accordingly executed and enrolled.

"Thomas Coke, Thomas Hanby, John Pawson, John Murlin, Thomas Taylor, John Broadbent, George Shadford, Samuel Bradburn, Francis Wrigley, Duncan Wright, William Thompson, John Valton, Alexander Mather, Thomas Rankin, Richard Rodda, Thomas Wride, Joseph Cole, Joseph Taylor, James Wood, Benjamin Rhoades, Charles Boon, John Barber, Joshua Keighley, Joseph Harper, William Collins, Thomas Tennant, William Ashman, Simon Day, Thomas Warwick, William Myles, Isaac Brown, Joseph Pescod, John Moon, John Peacock, Christopher Watkins, William Green, John Easton, George Whitfield, Parson Greenwood."

"LONDON, July 30, 1785.

"We, whose names are under written, but who were not present at the last Bristol Conference, do declare our approbation of the substance and design of the deed which Mr. Wesley has lately executed and enrolled for the purpose of giving a legal specification of the phrase, 'The Conference of the People called Methodists.'"

Then follow the names of thirty preachers.[1]

After the deed had been enrolled, some of the preachers claimed that Mr. Wesley had, by the enrollment and execution of the Deed of Declaration,

[1] Minutes 1785, Vol. I, pp. 181, 182; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., p. 31.

given up the power he previously possessed over the societies; but Mr. Wesley soon set the matter at rest by making the following statement:

"No power which I ever enjoyed is given up by the Declaration Deed. No such thing could have been supposed, had it not been for that improper and ambiguous word 'life-estate.' This also has given the grand occasion of offense to them that sought occasion."[1]

The deed did not take from Mr. Wesley the power he had exercised, but when he died that power passed to the Conference.

About seven years after the execution of the deed, John Wesley, on the 2d of March, 1791, at the age of almost eighty-eight years, passed from a life of toil, suffering, and almost unparalleled success, to the sphere of eternal reward, leaving behind him in vigorous action a religious and ecclesiastical force which vivified and transformed other Churches when he was alive, and since his death has penetrated to the ends of the earth, performing a similar work as well as building up great Church organizations. To have had the leadership of this phenomenal organizer and marvelous executive was an incalculable advantage, and the Conference which took the control after Mr. Wesley's death showed that its members had profited by the training received under him.

The first meeting of that Conference after Wesley's decease was a memorable one in many respects. One

[1] Minutes 1785, Vol. I, p. 181; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d. Ed., p. 80.

of the special incidents was the reading of the letter Mr. Wesley had left in the care of Mr. Joseph Bradford. As might have been anticipated, its paternal tenderness produced a profound impression; and after hearing it, the Conference passed a series of resolutions in one of which it was declared:

"That all the preachers who are in full connection with them shall enjoy every privilege that the members of the Conference enjoy, agreeably to the above written letter of our venerable deceased father in the gospel."[1]

So the legal hundred did not domineer over the other preachers, but, at the very first Conference held under the deed, found a way for the recognition of all the ministers in full connection, even if they were not of the favored hundred; and in later years, though the legal hundred is technically the legal Conference, yet practically the ministers outside the hundred have been granted a voice and a vote, and, to all intents and purposes, constitute the Conference; but the details of the arrangement do not fall within our province.[2]

To show how comprehensive had been the training of the preachers under Wesley, as shown in the established usages and the Large Minutes, we need but refer to the fact that at this first Conference after the death of Wesley, when the formal question was asked, "Is it necessary to enter into any engagements in re-

[1] Minutes 1791, Vol. I, p. 242; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d. Ed., p. 32.

[2] See the Ecclesiastical Principles and Polity of the Wesleyan Methodists, by William Peirce, revised by Frederick J. Jobson, D. D., 3d Ed., published at the Wesleyan Conference Office, London, England.

spect to our future plan of economy?" the answer recorded was, "We engage to follow strictly the plan which Mr. Wesley left us at his death."[1]

Thus, through questions concerning property and questions relating to the continuance of the Methodist organization, involving both preachers and people, the Deed of Declaration was made. By it Wesley perpetuated the Methodist organization in Great Britain, preserved title to the chapel property, and made the Conference a legally incorporated institution, which would be the governing body, possessing legislative, judicial, and executive functions.

When Wesley died the deed came into full force. With the active deed, the legal Conference commenced to live, and Conference government in British Methodism began. No longer should one man rule, no matter how good or great he might be; but the body of the preachers would control. Mr. Wesley's departure was the end of personal government, and the incoming of Conference government for British Methodism.

[1] Minutes, 1791, Vol. I, p. 254; Peirce's Wesleyan Polity, 3d Ed., p. 448.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EARLY AMERICAN CONFERENCES DOWN TO 1777.

THE last chapter brought us to the year 1791, when the Rev. John Wesley died, and the British Methodist Conference was established as a governing power.

Now we turn our thoughts back about twenty-five years, and look across the Atlantic to America.

Whitefield, the great Calvinistic Methodist, sailed from England for America the day before John Wesley landed in England on his return from Georgia, in 1738.[1] This was Whitefield's first voyage to the New World; but it was followed by many other visits, which caused him to cross the ocean thirteen times. When in America, he itinerated through the country along the Atlantic sea-board; not attempting to organize a new denomination, but reviving existing Churches, and awakening the people generally.

Organized Wesleyan Methodism was not introduced into America until about twenty-five years after the organization of the first society in England. The generally accepted date is 1766, though some authorities would place it a little earlier.

It was introduced somewhat irregularly; that is to say, it did not begin through any set purpose of

[1] Luke Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. I, p. 171.

propagation under, any official authority, or by regularly appointed missionaries.

As to what person introduced Wesleyan Methodism into America, there has been a difference of opinion. Some have given the honor to Philip Embury, acting under the influence of Mrs. Barbara Heck; while others would give the honor to Robert Strawbridge.

Embury came from a colony of Germans, who, fleeing from the Palatinate on account of religious persecution, had settled in Ireland. This Irish Palatine had been a licensed local preacher in Ireland, and began to preach in America in the autumn of 1766.[1] Robert Strawbridge also was an Irish local preacher, and probably came to the Colonies about the same time as Embury; but Mr. Embury began his work as a preacher in New York City, while Mr. Strawbridge began his work in Maryland.

The first chapel in New York was built in 1768, on John Street; and this was called Wesley Chapel, or, according to Jesse Lee, "Wesley's Chapel."[2]

Strawbridge introduced Methodism into Maryland, where he settled on Sams Creek, in Frederick County, and immediately opened his own house as a preaching-place.[3]

[1] A. Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p. 54; John Atkinson, Centennial History of American Methodism, p. 9.

[2] Jesse Lee, A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America, Baltimore, 1810, p. 25.

[3] Lee's History of Methodists, p. 25; Stevens's History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p. 73; Atkinson, Centennial History of Methodism, p. 9; Methodist Quarterly Review, 1856, p. 436; Lednum's Rise of Methodism in America, p. 16.

George M. Roberts, M. D., a distinguished local preacher of Baltimore, who had investigated the case with great care, maintained that Strawbridge began to preach in his own house as early as 1760, and that he had a second preaching-place in 1762.[1]

The Rev. William Hamilton, of Baltimore, in his article on "Early Methodism in Maryland," published in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* of 1856, states that under Mr. Strawbridge "a society consisting of twelve or fifteen persons was formed as early as 1763 or 1764, and soon after a place of worship was erected called the 'Log Meeting-house,' about a mile from the residence of Mr. Strawbridge."[2] The Rev. William Fort is authority for the statement that "as early as 1762 or 1763, Strawbridge was not only preaching, but baptizing, in Frederick County," and that "tradition says that Strawbridge was ordained by a German minister, in all probability by Mr. Benedict Swoope, who then resided in that region."[3]

Bishop Asbury, in his journal, under date of April 30, 1801, says: "We arrived to dine at Alexander Warfield's, on Sams Creek, and pushed on to Henry Willis's, on Pipe Creek, where it had been our intention to open Conference. . . . This settlement of Pipe Creek is the richest in the State. Here Mr. Strawbridge formed the first society in

[1] Roberts's Letters in Christian Advocate and Journal, New York, 1858; J. Lednum, Rise of Methodism in America, Philadelphia, 1859, p. 15.

[2] Methodist Quarterly Review, 1856, p. 438.

[3] Fort's article in Christian Advocate and Journal, New York, July 10, 1844.

Maryland—*and America;*" and, showing how much importance he attached to the declaration, Asbury italicizes the words "*and America.*"[1]

This, however, is not the place to settle this disputed point as to the priority of the work of Embury or Strawbridge.[2]

We refer to Strawbridge particularly because of his great influence in the early days, and especially because of his historic importance in connection with the early Conferences.

Captain Webb, of the British Army, who delighted in his Greek Testament, was another local preacher, who for years rendered incalculable service to American Methodism in its initial period. These three local preachers, Embury, Strawbridge, and Webb, laid the foundations of Wesleyan Methodism in the new country. Under them the work grew, and soon there were regularly organized societies in New York, Philadelphia, and Maryland, and requests were sent to Mr. Wesley for regularly appointed preachers.

In 1769, the very year Wesley first introduced

[1] Asbury's Journal, Vol. III, p. 27.

[2] For a fuller discussion of this subject, *pro* and *con*, see Rev. Wm. Fort's communication in the Christian Advocate and Journal, 1844; Hamilton's Early Methodism in Maryland, Methodist Quarterly Review, New York, July, 1856, pp. 431–448; J. B. Wakeley, Lost Chapters from Early History of American Methodism, New York, 1858, pp. 156–189; Roberts, Letters in Christian Advocate and Journal, New York, 1858; John Lednum, Rise of Methodism in America, Philadelphia, 1859, pp. 15–23; Abel Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 1865, pp. 47–80; John Atkinson, Centennial History of American Methodism, New York, 1884, pp. 9–18. Wakeley and Stevens grant priority to Embury. Dr. Atkinson leans in that direction but the others favor Strawbridge.

his plan for the perpetuity of the British Conference, his thoughts turned toward America, as though anxious to give permanence to Methodism on both sides of the ocean.

At this Conference Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor were appointed to go to America, and these were the first regularly appointed Methodist preachers in America. Pilmoor had been educated at Wesley's Kingswood School,[1] and had been a regular preacher four years. As Mr. Boardman had been an itinerant preacher six years, he ranked as the senior.

At the very time they were crossing the Atlantic, Whitefield was making his final voyage to America,[2] and in May of the next year, Whitefield, journeying northward, passed through Philadelphia, and, saluting Wesley's missionaries, expressed his satisfaction at finding them in this country.[3] Then he went North, and died, on the 30th of September, at Newburyport, Massachusetts. About this time the preachers received re-enforcements in the persons of Robert Williams and John King, both of whom came from England. Williams was a local preacher, and had permission from Wesley to labor under the missionaries he had sent,[4] but John King was without a license. This, however, did not deter him from preaching, and in a short time he was regularly licensed. Both proved to be exceedingly useful, and Robert Williams has the

---

[1] Stevens, Hist. of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p. 98.
[2] A. Stevens, Hist. of M. E. Ch., Vol. I. p. 101.
[3] Jesse Lee, Short History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 36.
[4] Lee's History of Methodists, pp. 26, 27.

peculiar distinction of being the first Methodist preacher in America, to marry, to locate, and to die.[1]

This year, 1770, "America" appeared for the first time, in Wesley's list of appointments, and had in connection with it four names: Joseph Pilmoor, Richard Boardman, Robert Williams, and John King.[2]

The work grew rapidly, and soon the demand for service was greater than the ability of the missionaries to respond. So, in the spring of 1770, Pilmoor wrote a letter to Wesley and his Conference in England, urging other ministers to come to the help of those in the Colonies. Among other things, he states that Mr. Boardman and himself "are chiefly confined to the cities, and therefore can not, at present, go much into the country, as we have more work upon our hands than we are able to perform. There is work enough for two preachers in each place, and if two of our brethren would come over, I believe it would be attended with great blessing."[3]

We are not surprised, therefore, to find Mr. Wesley, in 1771, sending two other missionaries; namely, Francis Asbury and Richard Wright. Wright had been an itinerant preacher only one year, and so was outranked by Asbury, who had been a regular preacher four years, he having entered the itinerant ranks in 1766, the very year Embury began to preach in New York.

Boardman and Pilmoor having thus been aided,

[1] Leroy M. Lee's Life of Jesse Lee, p. 55.
[2] A. Stevens, Hist. of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p. 110.
[3] Arminian Magazine, 1784, p. 223.

we find them making more extensive tours. In April, 1772, it was decided that Mr. Pilmoor should travel south, and Mr. Boardman should visit the North.[1] Asbury, in his journal, under the date of April 2, 1772, refers to this. He says: "I came to Philadelphia, and finding Brother B. [Boardman] and Brother W. [Wright] there, was much comforted. Brother B.'s [Boardman's] plan was that he should go to Boston; Brother P. [Pilmoor] to Virginia; Brother W. [Wright] to York [New York]; and that I should stay three months in Philadelphia. With this I am well pleased." [2]

That year "Mr. Pilmoor traveled and preached through Maryland to Norfolk, in Virginia; and left Norfolk in the beginning of 1773, and traveled through the lower parts of Virginia and North Carolina, to Charleston, in South Carolina; and from thence to Savannah, in Georgia; and then to the Orphan House, which was begun by Mr. Whitefield, in March, 1740; after which he returned again to the North, some time in the following spring. Mr. Boardman went as far to the north as Boston, and then returned to New York." [3] Dr. Bangs states not only that Mr. Boardman preached in Boston, but also that he "formed a small society" in that place.[4] In the autumn of 1772 an administrative change of considerable moment was made. Asbury, in his Journal for October 10th,

[1] Lee's History of the Methodists, p. 38.
[2] Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, p. 13.
[3] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, pp. 39, 40.
[4] Nathan Bangs, D. D., History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1857, Vol. I, p. 73.

of this year, says: "I received a letter from Mr. Wesley, in which he required a strict attention to discipline, and appointed me to act as assistant. He also enjoined that Mr. W. [Williams] might not print any more books without his consent."[1]

Bangs, referring to this, uses the title "general assistant,"[2] but that title does not appear to have been used until a later date. Asbury merely says he was appointed "to act as assistant."

As already observed, in England, so in America, at this time there were grades among the preachers. Some were called assistants, and some were called helpers. As Lee explains: "The *helper* was the young preacher in each circuit where there were generally two preachers in a circuit. The *assistant* was the oldest preacher in the circuit, who had the charge of the young preacher and of the business of the circuit."[3]

On the 19th of the same month, Asbury says that at Princeton he "met Mr. B. [Boardman], and we both agreed in judgment about the affairs of the society."[4] Dr. Stevens, alluding to this, speaks of Boardman as having been "reduced from an 'assistant' to a 'helper.'"[5] This, however, depends upon the status of the work at that time. Subsequently there were many "assistants" and the appointment of a new one did not necessarily mean the deposition of

[1] Asbury's Journal, New York, 1821, Vol. I, p. 29.
[2] Bangs, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1857, Vol. I, p. 74.
[3] Jesse Lee, Hist. of Methodists, Balt., 1810, p. 41.
[4] Asbury's Journal, New York, 1821, Vol. I, p. 30.
[5] Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865, Vol. I, p. 131.

an old one. At that very time, in England, there was a large number of "assistants." If America at that time had a number of circuits, then there might have been an "assistant" for each circuit. Mr. Wesley, however, seems to have considered all America as one circuit, and it would appear that Mr. Asbury's work was of a general character.

If Mr. Boardman was reduced, one would naturally ask, Why? for he was an older man and had been longer in the ministry than Mr. Asbury. Mr. Wesley thought well of him; for after his decease he referred to him as "a pious, good-natured, sensible man, greatly beloved of all that knew him,"[1] and proposed for his tombstone an epitaph containing these lines:

> "With zeal for God, with love of souls inspired,
> Nor awed by dangers nor by labors tired,
> *Boardman* in distant worlds proclaims the word
> To multitudes, and turns them to his Lord."[2]

Asbury was a very positive character, and was not long in asserting himself after he arrived in America. He landed in Philadelphia on the 27th day of October, 1771.[3]

On the 12th of November he set out for New York, where he found Richard Boardman "in peace, but weak in body."[4] On the 20th of the same month, after he had been in New York only about eight days and in the country only about twenty-four

---

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., New York, 1853, Vol. VII, p. 433.
[2] *Id.*, p. 156.
[3] Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, p. 4. [4] *Id.*, p. 5.

days, he makes this note in his journal: "Tuesday, 20th, I remain in York [New York], though unsatisfied with our being both in town together. I have not yet the thing which I seek—a circulation of preachers to avoid partiality and popularity. However, I am fixed to the Methodist plan, and do what I do faithfully as to God. I expect trouble is at hand. This I expected when I left England, and I am willing to suffer—yea, to die—sooner than betray so good a cause by any means. It will be a hard matter to stand against all opposition as an iron pillar strong, and steadfast as a wall of brass; but, through Christ strengthening me, I can do all things."[1]

What does all this mean? One might infer that he was being strongly antagonized. Surely it could not be by Mr. Boardman, for only seven days before he wrote in his journal: "My friend B. [Boardman] is a kind, loving, worthy man, truly amiable and entertaining, and of a child-like temper."

On the 22d he writes: "At present I am dissatisfied. I judge we are to be shut up in the cities this winter. My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way. I am in trouble, and more trouble is at hand, for I am determined to make a stand against all partiality. I have nothing to seek but the glory of God, nothing to fear but his displeasure. I am come over with an upright intention, and through the grace of God I will make it appear."[2]

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 6. [2] *Ibid.*

He talks very much more like a chief than a helper. Mr. Boardman was the "assistant" who was empowered to direct, and Mr. Asbury was the "helper," who should carry out the directions, according to "the Methodist plan" to which he alludes. But Mr. Asbury appears to see that things are not properly managed, and he puts upon himself the burden of finding a remedy.

As to staying in the cities, Mr. Pilmoor had mentioned that very matter in his letter to Mr. Wesley, and indicated that they needed more men in order to enable them to travel as freely as they desired; and we find, in harmony with this, that not long after the arrival of Asbury and Wright, both Mr. Boardman and Mr. Pilmoor start on and prosecute long journeys to the North and the South.

Now Mr. Asbury is actually in the position of "assistant," and has an opportunity to see what he can do as the authorized manager of the work and superintendent of the preachers. Of executive ability he soon proved that he possessed an abundance; and with it was joined great activity and power of long sustained exertion.

He quickly flew from point to point, preaching frequently, holding quarterly meetings, and endeavoring to enforce discipline.

At that time there were no Annual Conferences, and "the preachers regulated their business at the different quarterly meetings,"[1] which were held here

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 41.

and there to accommodate the preachers and societies within easy reach.

The first quarterly meeting of which we have any record was held on the western shore of Maryland. Mr. Asbury, in his journal for Tuesday, December 23, 1772, says he "set off for J. P.'s [J. Presbury's] to attend our quarterly meeting. Many people attended, and several friends came many miles. I preached from Acts xx, 28: 'Take heed therefore unto yourselves,' etc." Then he remarks:

"We afterwards proceeded to our temporal business, and considered the following propositions:

"1. What are our collections? We found them sufficient to defray our expenses.

"2. How are the preachers stationed? Brother S. [Strawbridge] and Brother O. [Owen], in Frederick County [Western Shore of Maryland]; Brother K. [King], Brother W. [Webster], and I. R. [Isaac Rollins], on the other side of the bay [Eastern Shore]; and myself in Baltimore.

"3. Shall we be strict in our society meetings, and not admit strangers? Agreed.

"4. Shall we drop preaching in the day-time through the week? Not agreed to.

"5. Will the people be contented without our administering the sacrament? J. K. [John King] was neuter; Brother S. [Strawbridge] pleaded much for the ordinances, and so did the people, who appeared to be much biased by him. I told them I would not agree to it at that time, and insisted on our abiding by our rules. But Mr. B. [Boardman] had given them their way at the quarterly meeting held here before, and I was obliged to connive at some things for the sake of peace.

"6. Shall we make collections weekly, to pay the preachers' board and expenses? This was not agreed to.

"We then inquired into the moral character of the preachers and exhorters. Only one exhorter was found any way doubtful, and we have great hopes of him. Brother S. [Straw-

bridge] received £8 quarterage; Brother K. [King] and myself, £6 each.

"Great love subsisted among us in this meeting, and we parted in peace."[1]

Here we have the question of the administration of the sacraments by the Methodist preachers of that day. It is evident that Strawbridge had been officiating in this matter, and that the Methodist people of that section wanted the sacraments from their own preachers. Mr. Asbury "would not agree to it at that time," and criticises Mr. Boardman because he "had given them their way." Then this strict disciplinarian surprises us by acknowledging that he "was obliged to connive at some things for the sake of peace." It was doubtless a concession to the great local influence of Mr. Strawbridge.

It will also be observed that the appointments for the preachers were announced at the quarterly meetings.

Mr. Asbury appears to have made it a point to visit the different quarterly meetings, very much as the presiding elders of more modern times.

The next quarterly meeting of which Mr. Asbury gives an account was held at the same place on the 30th of March, 1773. His entry in his journal is as follows:

"Tuesday, 30th. Our quarterly meeting began. After I had preached, we proceeded to business; and in our little conference the following queries were propounded, viz:

"1. Are there no disorderly persons in our classes? It was thought not.

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, pp. 87 and 88.

"2. Does not dram-drinking too much prevail among our people?

"3. Do none contract debts without due care to pay them? We found that this evil is much avoided among our people.

"4. Are the band-meetings kept up?

"5. Is there nothing immoral in any of our preachers?

"6. What preachers travel now, and where are they stationed?

"It was then urged that none must break our rules, under the penalty of being excluded from our connection.

"All was settled in the most amicable manner.

"Mr. S. [Strawbridge] preached a good and useful sermon from Joel ii, 17; 'Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar,' etc.

"Many people were present at our love-feast, among whom were many strangers; but all were deeply serious, and the power of God was present indeed. Brother O. [Owen] preached a very alarming sermon, and Brother S. [Strawbridge] gave a moving exhortation. The whole ended in great peace, and we all went, in the strength of the Lord, to our several appointments."[1]

These two specimens give a fair idea of the style of quarterly meetings in that period. There were the sermons and the love-feast, and the old fashion of one preacher following the sermon of another with an exhortation. It will be noticed that there was a very decided variation in the questions, showing that there was no settled form. In the report of the second meeting the answers to some of the questions are not given, and there is no mention of the sacramental question. Possibly the latter was omitted "for the sake of peace."

The year 1773 marks an epoch in both English and American Methodism. It will be remembered

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 46.

that in the English Conference of this year, Wesley reintroduced the plan of 1769 for continuing and empowering that Conference, so as to perpetuate British Methodism. The same year he sent to America two preachers, one of whom had much to do in molding the Methodist organism in this country. At the English Conference, held in August, 1772, Captain Webb appeared, and earnestly appealed for preachers to go to America. Prior to this, the old soldier urged the appointment of Christopher Hopper, one of Wesley's ablest and most reliable men, and the cultured Joseph Benson, whom Dr. Adam Clarke called "a sound scholar, a powerful and able preacher, and a profound theologian." Charles Wesley, however, opposed this, and was so surprised at the zealous captain's picture of the possibilities in the new continent that he pronounced him fanatical.[1] His appeal to the Conference so stirred the preachers, that Thomas Rankin and George Shadford offered themselves to go the following spring.[2]

George Shadford had been itinerant preacher five years. Thomas Rankin had been a regular preacher eleven years. Wesley reposed great confidence in Rankin, even taking him as his traveling companion. Rankin was born in Scotland, in 1738, so that when he came as a preacher to America he was about thirty-five years of age. He had, in his younger days, prepared to enter the College at Edinburgh,[3]

[1] A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p. 142.
[2] Methodist Magazine, London, 1816, p. 645.
[3] McClintock and Strong's Encyclopædia.

so that he had the foundations of a good education. Circumstances, however, diverted him from his original purpose, and he sailed for America to engage in a commercial enterprise; but he soon returned to his native land. He became "one of the commanding men of the Wesleyan Ministry," and "an experienced disciplinarian."[1]

One writing, in 1770, of a visit of Wesley to Leeds, interjects this mention: "Mr. Rankin, who travels with him, is a blessed man, and seems to fear no one's face."[2]

This was the man whom Wesley appointed his general assistant for America, giving him charge of all the preachers and societies in the Colonies. Stevens suggests that "Wesley judged him competent to manage the difficulties which had arisen under the administration of Asbury, as represented in the correspondence of the latter,"[3] and Bangs says: "It seems that, notwithstanding the vigilance of Mr. Asbury in correcting those abuses which had arisen from the laxity with which discipline had been administered, many disorders still existed for which an adequate remedy had not been provided. These things had been communicated to Mr. Wesley, and he therefore clothed Mr. Rankin with powers superior to any which had been vested in his predecessors in office."[4] Samuel Drew, in his Life of Dr. Coke,

---

[1] A. Stevens, History Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p, 142.
[2] L. Tyerman, Life of John Wesley, Vol. III, p. 69.
[3] A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p. 142.
[4] N. Bangs, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1857, Vol. I. p. 80.

probably suggests the cause of the lack of discipline, when he says:

"Mr Asbury, on his arrival, soon perceived that the work which had been so happily begun, was confined chiefly to the larger towns; but that, under proper regulations, it was susceptible of a much greater extension, if carried into the villages and secluded plantations that were scattered throughout the country. To these departments he therefore devoted his time and talents; and, in the blessing which attended his ministry and the great success which he found in the formation of societies, he thought himself amply rewarded for all the inconveniences with which his solitary excursions were attended. But while he was thus engaged in visiting the plantations and villages an undue eagerness to extend the work in the towns had unhappily led to a comparative neglect of discipline. Some apprehensions of this seem to have been anticipated in England."[1]

In other words, Asbury had undertaken an expansion which prevented his strengthening the centers. Wesley intrenched himself in the cities and towns, giving them special care; and from these strong centers extended into the country. Even in Asbury's day the center of influence was the city; much more is it to-day, and the Church or cause that would be potent must be strong in the cities.

Thomas Rankin, the reliable, was sent by Wesley to set in order the affairs of American Methodism,

[1] Samuel Drew, Life of Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., 1817, Amer. Ed., New York, 1847, p. 61.

and to carry forward its work; and, as Jesse Lee observes, "From that time, Mr. Rankin had the superintendency of the Methodist connection in America, and was styled the general assistant."[1]

Mr. Rankin was the first to bear this title. Before his coming, no preacher in America had any higher title than that of assistant. General assistant implied something more. The assistant had charge of the circuit and the preachers who were associated with him on the circuit, and he was limited to his circuit; but the title of general assistant implied that there were a number of circuits with their assistants, and that the person bearing this title had general charge of the entire work, including the assistants.

This new appointment reveals the fact that Wesley's control in America was regarded as supreme. He appointed and recalled preachers at pleasure, and, at his pleasure, elevated one and deposed another. So Asbury, from being for a brief period the chief over others in America, becomes, by Wesley's act, a subordinate to the recently appointed general assistant.

In the beginning of June, 1773, Thomas Rankin and George Shadford landed at Philadelphia; and "immediately after Mr. Rankin's arrival in Philadelphia, he called the traveling preachers together."[2] This was the call for the first Conference of American Methodist preachers, and the Conference met in Philadelphia.

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 45. [2] *Ibid.*

The printed Minutes say this Conference was held in June, 1773; but Asbury says the Conference began on Wednesday, the 14th of July. The precise entry is: "Wednesday 14. Our General Conference began."[1] This note is peculiar also from the fact that here for the first time we find the phrase "General Conference," Asbury apparently using it in contradistinction to the local quarterly meetings or Quarterly Conferences which had heretofore been held in America.

Rankin records that "there were present seven preachers, besides Boardman and Pilmoor, who were to return to England." Asbury did not arrive until the second day, and Dr. Stevens counts him as the tenth member present.[2] Mr. Asbury says: "Came safe to the city on Thursday, but did not find such perfect harmony as I could wish for."[3] What the discord was he does not mention, but leaves us to infer or imagine.

The Minutes of that first Yearly Conference are very brief. The heading in the printed copy is as follows:

"Minutes of Some Conversations between the Preachers in Connection with the Reverend Mr. John Wesley. Philadelphia, June, 1773."

Then follows the body of the Minutes, in the form of question and answer.

---

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 55. For fuller statement see A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865, Vol. I, p. 161.
[2] A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p. 160.
[3] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 55.

"The following queries were proposed to every preacher:

"1. Ought not the authority of Mr. Wesley and that Conference to extend to the preachers and people in America, as well as in Great Britain and Ireland?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"2. Ought not the doctrine and discipline of the Methodists, as contained in the Minutes, to be the sole rule of our conduct, who labor in the connection with Mr. Wesley, in America?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"3. If so, does it not follow, that if any preachers deviate from the Minutes, we can have no fellowship with them till they change their conduct?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"The following rules were agreed to by all the preachers present:

"1. Every preacher who acts in connection with Mr. Wesley and the brethren who labor in America, is strictly to avoid administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

"2. All the people among whom we labor to be earnestly exhorted to attend the Church, and to receive the ordinances there; but in a particular manner, to press the people in Maryland and Virginia to the observance of this minute.

"3. No person or persons to be admitted into our love-feasts oftener than twice or thrice, unless they become members; and none to be admitted to the society meetings more than twice.

"4. None of the preachers in America to reprint any of Mr. Wesley's books without his authority (when it can be gotten) and the consent of their brethren.

"5. Robert Williams to sell the books he has already printed, but to print no more, unless under the above restrictions.

"6. Every preacher who acts as an assistant, to send an account of the work once in six months to the general assistant.

"*Ques.* 1. How are the preachers stationed?

"*Ans.*—

"New York, Thomas Rankin,
"Philadelphia, George Shadford, } to change in four months.

"New Jersey, John King, William Watters.

"Baltimore, } Francis Asbury, Robert Strawbridge, Abraham Whitworth, Joseph Yearbry.

"Norfolk, Richard Wright.

"Petersburg, Robert Williams.

"*Ques.* 2. What members are there in the society?

"*Ans.*—

New York	180	Maryland	500
Philadelphia	180	Virginia	100
New Jersey	200		
		Preachers, 10. Total	1,160

The Minutes of this Conference were written and were kept in manuscript as was the case with those of succeeding Conferences, and "none of the Annual Minutes were published until the year 1785," after which the Minutes were printed annually. "However, in the year 1795," says Jesse Lee, "we had all the Minutes from 1773 to that time published and bound in one book."[1]

Being the first Annual Conference, the Minutes have a special interest, and that interest will be deepened by Asbury's memoranda. He says:

"The following propositions were agreed to:

"1. The old Methodist doctrine and discipline shall be enforced and maintained amongst all our societies in America.

"2. Any preacher who acts otherwise, can not be retained amongst us as a fellow-laborer in the vineyard.

"3. No preacher in our connection shall be permitted to administer the ordinances at this time, except Mr. S. [Strawbridge], and he under the particular direction of the assistant.

"4. No person shall be admitted more than once or twice to our love-feasts or society meetings without becoming a member.

"5. No preacher shall be permitted to print our books

[1] Jesse Lee, Hist. of Methodists, 1810, p. 45.

without the approbation of Mr. Wes'ey and the consent of his brethren. And that R. W. [Robert Williams], shall be allowed to sell what he has, but reprint no more.

"6. Every assistant is to send an account of the work of God in his circuit to the general assistant.

"There were some debates amongst the preachers in this Conference relative to the conduct of some who had manifested a desire to abide in the cities and live like gentlemen. Three years out of four have been already spent in the cities. It was also feared that money had been wasted, improper leaders appointed, and many of our rules broken."[1]

Jesse Lee, in his summary of the Minutes, also makes some points a little clearer. For example, instead of using in the first paragraph the words "that Conference" as in the printed Minutes, he uses the phrase "the English Conference;" and in the second, instead of using the words, "in the Minutes," he has "in the English Minutes."[2]

All these authorities show that the individual members of the Conference formally agreed to recognize the authority of the Rev. John Wesley, so that Mr. Wesley should govern them in America as he did their brethren in Great Britain and Ireland. In other words, it was admitted that his personal government was supreme among the American Methodists as it was over the preachers and societies on the other side of the ocean.

Further, they formally recognized the Large Minutes, which Wesley had collated and printed three years before, as the formulated doctrine and discipline which should govern their teaching and practice, so

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, pp. 55, 56.

[2] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 46.

that the Large Minutes would be the code to guide them, while Wesley's will, as expressed from time to time, would be the power by which they would be directed. In other words, the Conference did not have inhering in it any legislative, judicial, or executive power, but simply carried out what the Large Minutes set forth or what Wesley declared.

Again the sacramental question appears, and the preachers consent to Wesley's view that the sacraments should be received from the Church of England clergy. Asbury, however, tells us that an exception was made in the case of Robert Strawbridge. This was doubtless a concession to the ability and great influence of this remarkable man, and probably to the demand of the people, which demand arose from the difficulty of obtaining the sacraments from reputable clergymen at convenient times.

Robert Williams had done great good by printing and circulating selections from Wesley's writings,[1] but this was to cease unless permission was granted. There were several reasons for this: First, the works belonged to Wesley; secondly, there was an idea that a kind of censorship of the press was necessary to prevent error and to avoid bringing discredit upon Methodism; and, thirdly, it was thought, as Jesse Lee says, that the time had arrived when "it now became necessary for the preachers to be all united in the same cause of printing and selling our books, so that the profits arising therefrom might be divided

[1] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 49.

among the preachers, or applied to some charitable purpose."[1]

Finally, every assistant was to report his work to the general assistant, somewhat as the preacher-in-charge to-day is to report the conditions of his circuit or station to the presiding elder of the district.

These conclusions can hardly be called, in any strict sense, law-making. They were agreements rather than enactments. In view of certain irregularities, these particular points were agreed upon in the common effort to correct irregularities and to meet existing conditions. Wesley was recognized as the ruler, and the Large English Minutes as the law; and the American Conference had no power to change anything in the "Large Minutes."

The Minutes themselves seem to indicate that the above agreements were extrajudicial, for after them come, "*Ques.* 1. How are the preachers stationed?" and "*Ques.* 2. What numbers are there in the society?" as though these alone were the regular items. The Conference made no laws and made no appointments. Rankin, Wesley's general assistant and representative, assigned the preachers to their several localities, where they were to labor.

It will be observed that Boardman and Pilmoor are not mentioned in these Minutes. They received no appointments, because they were to return to England. Wesley, in his proposed epitaph for Boardman's tomb, indicates that his return was occasioned

[1] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 49.

by the mutterings of war in the Colonies; for even at this period there were premonitions of the Revolution.

The Minutes, however, reveal the fact that a native ministry was growing up. In the list of preachers who received appointments we find the name of "William Watters, of the Western Shore of Maryland," who "began to travel this year, and he was the first traveling preacher that was raised up among the Methodists in America."[1] Mr. Watters, for some reason, did not go to New Jersey; and Philip Gatch tells us he was called out by Mr. Rankin to fill the vacancy.[2] Thus, in Watters and Gatch, began a line of native American Methodist preachers.

The second American Conference met in Philadelphia, on the 25th of May, 1774; and from that time for many years, May was the favorite month for holding the Conferences, and especially that which was esteemed the most important.

The Minutes show that the preliminary questions of the former Conference were not asked at this, and further show, by the form and scope of the questions, that the Conference was settling down to a regular order of business.

They were as follows:

"*Ques.* 1. Who are admitted this year?

"*Ques.* 2. Who are admitted on trial?

"*Ques.* 3. Who are assistants this year?

[1] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 45.

[2] Gatch, in Lednum's Rise of Methodism in America, 1859, pp. 112 and 113.

"*Ques.* 4. Are there any objections to any of the preachers?
"*Ques.* 5. How are the preachers stationed this year?
"*Ques.* 6. What numbers are there in society?"

Jesse Lee explains the first question by adding the words "i. e., into full connection."[1] The answer to the fourth question was, "They were examined one by one"—a custom which has continued to this day. After the list of appointments comes the note: "All the preachers to change at the end of six months."

After the answers to the regular interrogatories comes the following statement:

"This Conference agreed to the following particulars:
"1. Every preacher who is received into full connection is to have the use and property of his horse, which any of the circuits may furnish him with.
"2. Every preacher to be allowed six pounds Pennsylvania currency per quarter and his traveling charges besides.
"3. For every assistant to make a general collection at Easter in the circuits where they labor; to be applied to the sinking of debts on the houses and relieving the preachers in want.
"4. Wherever Thomas Rankin spends his time he is to be assisted by those circuits."[2]

Now the assistants are named in order, with Thomas Rankin at the head, and next came Francis Asbury.

The journal of the latter contains a brief but suggestive reference to this Conference, as follows:

"Wednesday 25th. Our Conference began. The overbearing spirit of a certain person had excited my fears. My judgment was stubbornly opposed for

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 50.
[2] Minutes of Methodist Conferences, Vol I, 1773 to 1813, pp. 7, 8.

awhile, and at last submitted to. But it is my duty to bear all things with a meek and patient spirit. Our Conference was attended with great power, and, all things considered, with great harmony. We agreed to send Mr. W. [Wright] to England; and all acquiesced in the future stations of the preachers. My lot was to go to York [New York]. My body and mind have been much fatigued during the time of this Conference. And if I were not deeply conscious of the truth and goodness of the cause in which I am engaged, I should by no means stay here. Lord! what a world is this! Yea, what a religious world! O, keep my heart pure and my garments unspotted from the world! Our Conference ended on Friday with a comfortable intercession."[1]

From this it appears that Asbury had gone to the Conference with some apprehensions. It also appears that at the Conference his judgment was opposed; but it is just as evident that he had expressed his judgment with some vigor, and that at last the other side yielded. He does not give the name of the "certain person" who had the "overbearing spirit;" but it is very plain that the English Asbury and the Scotch Rankin did not harmonize.

Possibly Asbury felt a little aggrieved at being superseded after he had been assistant such a short time, and yet that may not be considered clear. In his journal of June 3, 1773, shortly after the landing of Rankin he makes this entry: "Thursday, 3d.

[1] Francis Asbury, Journal, 1821. Vol. I, p, 81.

To my great comfort arrived Mr. R. [Rankin], Mr. S. [Shadford], Mr. Y. [Yearbry], and Captain W. [Webb]. Mr. R. [Rankin] preached a good sermon on these words: 'I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.' He will not be admired as a preacher, but as a disciplinarian he will fill his place."[1]

He afterward appears to have formed a higher estimate of Mr. Rankin's preaching ability, for on the 13th of the same month he refers to him as having "dispensed the word of truth with power," and observes that "it reached the hearts of many, and they appeared to be much quickened."

Doubtless Rankin was appointed to superintend the work in America because he was "a disciplinarian." Possibly he had the Scotch type of rigidness in the discharge of duty, which Asbury and others could not help feeling. Bangs says that Rankin, "in the faithful exercise" of his superior power, "set himself to purifying the societies from corrupt members and restoring things to order," and "it was soon found that the discharge of this duty, however painful, instead of abridging the influence of ministerial labor, greatly extended it, and exerted a most salutary effect upon the societies."[2]

One may not say definitely what was the difficulty between Asbury and Rankin. Possibly it grew out of the clashing of two strong wills, backed by

[1] Francis Asbury, Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 52.

[2] N. Bangs, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1857, Vol. I, pp. 80, 81.

strong convictions. Asbury had his views and wishes, and Rankin had his; but Rankin, as general assistant, was supreme, and therefore Asbury was compelled to submit.

Dr. Strickland states that, in 1774, Asbury, "in consequence of his feeble health," "began to feel some solicitude about his appointment for the ensuing year," and that "he expressed a desire that he might be saved from going into what he called the low country."[1]

On the 4th of November, 1774, Asbury met Rankin in Philadelphia, when, he says, "I spoke my mind to Mr. R. [Rankin], but we did not agree in judgment. And it appeared to me that to make any attempt to go to Baltimore would be all in vain."[2] Two days after that, Mr. Asbury makes this record: "Wrote a letter to Mr. Wesley, which I read to Mr. R. [Rankin], that he might see I intended no guile or secret dealings. It is somewhat grievous that he should prevent my going to Baltimore, after being acquainted with my engagements and the importunities of my friends there."[3]

He evidently took an appeal to Mr. Wesley; but it was a manly act to apprise Mr. Rankin of the fact, and to let him peruse the contents of the letter. But about it all there is a little touch of human nature. Probably Mr. Rankin also reported to Mr. Wesley.

Whatever was the real source of the difference

[1] W. P. Strickland, Life of Francis Asbury, New York, 1858, p. 104.
[2] F. Asbury, Journal, 1821, p. 102. [3] *Ibid.*

between these strong men, Wesley, after hearing the case, decided that it would be better for Asbury to return to England.

In a letter to Mr. Rankin, dated March 1, 1775, Wesley says: "As soon as possible, you must come to a full and clear explanation, both with Brother Asbury (if he is recovered) and with Jemmy Dempster. But I advise Brother Asbury to return to England the first opportunity."[1] To the same letter Mr. Wesley added a message for all the preachers in America, in which are these words: "The conduct of T. Rankin has been suitable to the Methodist plan. I hope all of you tread in his steps. Let your eye be single. Be in peace with each other, and the God of peace will be with you."[2]

On April 21, 1775, Wesley writes Rankin: "Brother Asbury has sent me a few lines, and I thank him for them. But I do not advise him to go to Antigua. Let him come home without delay."[3] On the 19th of May, 1775, in a letter to the same person, he says: "I doubt not but Brother Asbury and you will part friends. I shall hope to see him at the Conference. He is quite an upright man. I apprehend he will go through his work more cheerfully when he is within a little distance from me."[4] In another letter to Mr. Rankin, written July 28, 1775, Wesley remarks: "I rejoice, too, over honest Francis Asbury, and hope he will no more enter into temptation"[5]—an allusion, probably, to the personal dif-

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, pp. 7, 8. [2] *Id.*, p. 8.
[3] *Id.*, p. 9. [4] *Ibid.* [5] *Id.*, p. 11.

ferences into which "honest Francis Asbury" had fallen.

Differences as to questions of policy or management of affairs may occur among the purest men, and, under some circumstances, the very honesty of a strong nature may bring them about. Whatever the dispute was about, it appears to have been at least partially adjusted; for Mr. Wesley wrote to Rankin on the 13th of August, 1775: "I am not sorry that Brother Asbury stays with you another year. In that time it will be seen what God will do with North America, and you will easily judge whether our preachers are called to remain any longer therein. If they are, God will make their way plain, and give them favor even with the men that delight in war."[1]

One of Mr. Wesley's letters, just quoted, reveals the fact that Asbury really had some thought of going to Antigua. On the 23d of February, 1775, which was prior to the date of Wesley's letter, Asbury makes this memorandum:

"I received a letter from Miss G. [Gilbert], at Antigua, in which she informed me that Mr. G. [Francis Gilbert] was going away; and as there are about three hundred members in society, she entreats me to go and labor amongst them. And as Mr. Wesley has given his consent, I feel inclined to go, and take one of the young men with me. But there is one obstacle in my way—the administration of the ordinances. It is possible to get the ordination of a presbytery; but this would be incompatible with

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, p. 11.

Methodism, which would be an effectual bar in my way."[1]

Who can say what would have been the effect on American Methodism had Asbury gone to the island of Antigua or returned to England? The history, as we narrate it, will give at least a partial answer.

The third Annual Conference was held in Philadelphia, in May, 1775, beginning on Wednesday, the 17th, and closing on the 19th.

Asbury says: "From Wednesday till Friday we spent in Conference, with great harmony and sweetness of temper."[2] The Minutes contain the names of three new preachers from Great Britain; namely, James Dempster, Martin Rodda, and William Glendenning. Mr. Dempster and Mr. Rodda had been sent out by Mr. Wesley during the previous year, and Mr. Glendenning appears to have accompanied them as a volunteer. James Dempster was a Scotchman of good education, having been educated at the University of Edinburgh; but the name will be more interesting in these later days from the fact that he was the father of the Rev. John Dempster, D. D., the organizer of theological seminaries in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The questions asked at this Conference were the same as those asked in 1774, excepting that the printed Minutes do not give the inquiry, "Are there any objections to any one of the preachers?" though no doubt it was asked. There are some directions about what preachers are to change in three months

[1] Francis Asbury, Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 107. [2] *Id.*, p. 114.

or six months; but the most important items are the following:

"Thomas Rankin is to travel till the month of December, and then take a quarter in New York.

"The preachers in Brunswick and Hanover, to change as the assistant thinks proper.

"Thomas Rankin's deficiencies to be paid out of the yearly collection.

"The preachers' expenses from Conference to their circuit to be paid out of the yearly collection.

"A general fast for the prosperity of the work, and for the peace of America, on Tuesday, the 13th of July."[1]

It will be recalled that in 1771 Mr. Asbury expressed himself as opposed to ministers remaining in the cities; but since that time he had been stationed in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and he desired to be reappointed to Baltimore at this Conference. Mr. Asbury had also been anxious for "a circulation of preachers to avoid partiality and popularity." This Mr. Rankin seems to have secured, for at this Conference he sent Asbury to Norfolk.

Now the Revolutionary War was raging with great fury, especially in the North. In the spring of 1776 Washington moved his army from Boston to New York, which was threatened by the British, and in the early part of June, Sir Henry Clinton landed with a strong force on Long Island.

This probably had something to do with shifting the Conference seat southwards; for the fourth Annual Conference opened in Baltimore, on the 21st of May, 1776.

[1] Minutes from 1773 to 1813, pp. 9, 10.

The questions asked this year were the same as those of the previous year. There were no resolutions or agreements, but another fast-day was appointed. At this Conference Freeborn Garrettson was "admitted on trial," and Asbury was appointed to Baltimore.

The fifth Annual Conference was held at Deer Creek Meeting-house, in Harford County, Maryland, on the 20th day of May, 1777.[1] Over this Conference Rankin presided, as he had over all held to date.[2] The Minutes show the same questions as before, with the restoration of the question, "Are there any objections to any of the preachers?" and the answer, "They were examined one by one." Another fast-day was ordered, and the following questions were asked:

"*Ques.* 7. As the present distress is such, are the preachers resolved to take no step to detach themselves from the work of God for the ensuing year?

"*Ans.* We purpose, by the grace of God, not to take any step that may separate us from the brethren, or from that blessed work in which we are engaged.

"*Ques.* 8. Has not the preaching of funeral sermons been carried so far as to prostitute that venerable custom, and in some sort to render it contemptible?

"*Ans.* Yes. Therefore let all the preachers inform every society, that we will not preach any but for those who we have reasons to think died in the fear and favor of God."[3]

The difficulties brought about by the war had greatly interfered with religious operations, yet there

[1] Minutes, and Lee's History of Methodists, pp. 60, 61.
[2] N. Bangs, Life of Freeborn Garrettson, 1832, p. 126.
[3] Minutes for 1777; Lee's History of Methodists, p. 61.

was an increase of twelve preachers, and a gain of over two thousand members, and, notwithstanding the unsettled state of the country, the preachers resolved to continue their services.

New York was occupied by the British, and while the name of the appointment appears in the Minutes, it was left without a preacher. The names of Thomas Rankin and Francis Asbury appear in the list of assistants, but not among those taking appointments. The reason of this will soon appear. Rankin had decided to return to England, and Asbury found it difficult to travel because of the antagonism to the English. Most of the leading preachers had come from Great Britain, and some of them, Rodda,[1] for example, had been imprudent in expressing their views in favor of the mother country, which was contrary to the advice of John and Charles Wesley.[2]

This created a prejudice against the other English-born preachers, even when they took no sides. Asbury met with obstacles as well as others. On the 20th of June, 1776, he records that he "was fined five pounds for preaching the gospel," near Baltimore.[3] Since the Conference of 1776 the Colonies had declared their independence, and, as the anti-British feeling became more intense, a number of

[1] Lee's History of Methodists, p. 62; N. Bangs, Life of Freeborn Garrettson, pp. 71, 72.

[2] Wesley's letter to Rankin, Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, p. 8; Charles Wesley to Rankin, L. Tyerman's Life of Wesley, Vol. III, pp. 194, 195.

[3] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 141.

the English preachers seriously considered the wisdom of returning to England. On Tuesday, the 21st of January, 1777, Asbury states that he received a message informing him that Mr. R—a [Rodda] and Mr. G. S. [George Shadford] were waiting to see him. Then he says: "After preaching, I set out, and met my brethren the same night, and found them inclined to leave America and embark for England. But I had before resolved not to depart from the work on any consideration. After some consultation, it was thought best that Mr. R—a [Rodda] should go to Mr. R—n [Rankin], and request his attendance here."[1] In March the same subject came up. On the 26th, Asbury says: "I received a letter from Brother S. [Shadford] intimating that, according to rule, the time was drawing near for us to return."[2] On Monday, the 30th, he says: "I was under some exercise of mind in respect to the times; my brethren are inclined to leave the continent, and I do not know but something may be propounded to me which would touch my conscience; but my determination is to trust in God, and be satisfied if the souls of my fellow-men are saved."[3] So he was a little uncertain as to the right course for him to pursue, but his entry of April 2d shows a strengthening determination to stay. On that date he writes: "Having received information that some of my brethren had determined on their departure, I wrote to Brother S. [Shadford], that as long as I could stay and preach

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 176. [2] *Id.*, p. 182. [3] *Ibid.*

without injuring my conscience, it appeared as my duty to abide with the flock; but I must confess Satan has harassed me with violent and various temptations."[1] So there was at times a conflict between the purpose to remain and the desire to depart.

Before the Conference of 1777 convened, Asbury appears to have made up his mind to remain in America. In his journal he intimates as much in his account of the Conference, and at the same time gives some items of information which give us a fuller conception as to the doings of the Conference than we can gather from the printed Minutes.

He says that on Monday, May 12th, he set out for the "Yearly Conference, and having preached at Mr. P.'s by the way, came safe to Mr. G.'s, and was glad to see the preachers there."

Whether this gathering was accidental or by agreement we can not say. It looks a little like a caucus. Certainly, whether premeditated or not, it was of the nature of a preparatory meeting. Continuing, he remarks: "We had some weighty conversation on different points, and, among other things, it was asked whether we could give our consent that Mr. R. [Rankin] should baptize, as there appeared to be a present necessity. But it was objected that this would be a breach of our discipline, and it was not probable that things would continue long in such a disordered state. The next day, with great harmony and joint consent, we drew a rough draught for stationing the preachers the ensuing year. And on Friday we conversed on

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, pp. 182, 183.

the propriety of signing certificates avouching good conduct for such of the preachers as chose to go to Europe. But I could not see the propriety of it at this time. We also conversed on such rules as might be proper for the regulation of the preachers who abide on the continent. And it was judged necessary that a committee should be appointed to superintend the whole. And on Monday [May 19th] we rode together to attend the Conference at Deer Creek."[1]

Most assuredly this was a remarkable meeting. It looks too systematic to have been entirely accidental, and one would be pardoned for presuming that it had been prearranged that these preachers should meet at this point more than a week before Conference, and remain in session about a week. Then the matters discussed were of a striking character, as will be seen after the most hasty reading.

The pressure for the sacraments and the real need of ministers to administer them to the Methodists, must have been very manifest when these preachers discussed the question as to whether "Mr. R. should baptize." It is quite certain that Mr. Rankin was not present at this time, and it would seem that it was because of his probable departure from the country that most of these points were considered. In a short time he, Wesley's representative, would return to Great Britain. Without Wesley's general assistant, they would be like a body without a head. The war would prevent communication with Wesley, or the reception of directions from him. They would be isolated and

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 186.

left to themselves, and so they "conversed on such rules as might be proper for the regulation of the preachers who abide on the continent" after Rankin and others whom Wesley had sent should leave for British shores. And so "it was judged necessary that a committee should be appointed to superintend the whole."

Did Asbury suggest that arrangement? Possibly he did. It is simply the plan proposed by Wesley in 1769 for the Conference to follow when death took him from their head, and at that time Asbury was one of Wesley's preachers in England, and doubtless knew about the idea of committee control. Probably the American preachers generally were familiar with it. Whether they knew of Wesley's plan or not, it is plain that at that time they had no thought of permitting one person to have supreme control in the absence of Wesley's representative. However, there is no evidence in the Minutes that the Conference adopted this scheme of government, though Dr. Stevens, without giving his authority, says: "As the English preachers had retired before the storm of the Revolution, and Asbury was in confinement, the session of that body in 1777 appointed a committee of five to take the general superintendency of the denomination. It consisted of Gatch, Dromgoole, Glendenning, Ruff, and Watters. Gatch served in this capacity till Asbury could again venture into the open field."[1] Evidently there are some errors in this

[1] A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865, Vol I, p. 381

statement. The English preachers were at the Conference of 1777. Asbury was not "in confinement," but was present also, and did not retire until the next year, as we shall see. Further, if such a committee had been appointed, Asbury would probably have been a member; or if not, Watters, as the oldest preacher, would have been named first. What is more, Gatch that very year was compelled to retire from the effective work on account of injuries and illness, and, as Stevens himself shows, his name does not again appear in the Minutes as taking an appointment until years after, when he had removed to Ohio.[1] Lee, who mentions many minor details of the Conferences, makes no reference to any such arrangement.

Dr. Stevens possibly drew his information from Lednum, who says: "As it was probable that all the English preachers would return home on account of the war, it was judged most prudent to appoint a committee of five of the most judicious of the preachers that would remain to superintend the work. Messrs. Wm. Watters, Philip Gatch, Daniel Ruff, Edward Dromgoole, and William Glendenning were the committee."[2]

Lednum quotes no authority; but his putting of the case is more probable than that of Stevens; and yet neither Asbury nor Lee refer to such an appointment by the Conference, and there is no mention of it in the Minutes of 1777.

[1] A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, pp. 379-381.

[2] Rev. John Lednum, History of Rise of Methodism in America, Philadelphia, 1859, p. 190.

Asbury throws a little more light upon the Conference in the final part of his memorandum. He says:

"So greatly has the Lord increased the number of traveling preachers within these few years that we have now twenty-seven who attend the circuits, and twenty of them were present at this Conference. Both our public and private business was conducted with great harmony, peace, and love. Our brethren who intend to return to Europe have agreed to stay till the way is quite open. I preached on the charge which our Lord gave his apostles, 'Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves.' Our Conference ended with a love-feast and watch-night. But when the time of parting came, many wept as if they had lost their first-born sons. They appeared to be in the deepest distress, thinking, as I suppose, they should not see the faces of the English preachers any more. This was such a parting as I never saw before. Our Conference has been a great time, a season of uncommon affection, and we must acknowledge that God has directed, owned, and blessed us in the work. A certificate, as mentioned above, had been acceded to, and signed in the Conference."[1]

Reliable evidence shows that neither the Minutes nor Mr. Asbury record all that occurred at the Conference of 1777. There is positive proof that the question of permitting the Methodist preachers to

[1] Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, p. 186.

administer the sacraments to the Methodist people, instead of subsiding, had grown in force, and was again brought up formally at this Conference. Freeborn Garrettson, who was a member of this Conference, states in his manuscript notes that at this session it was asked: "Shall the preachers in America administer the ordinances?" and that the answer given was: "We will suspend them until the next Conference."[1] In other words, as we interpret the answer, consideration of the question was postponed until the Annual Conference of the following year.

It is probable that Mr. Garrettson, drawing on his memory, gave the substance of the question and answer, rather than the exact wording, but the manuscript journal[2] of the Rev. Philip Gatch, who was also present at the Conference, gives us probably the exact language. In his journal Mr. Gatch records that the following questions were asked and the following answers given:

"*Ques.* What shall be done with respect to the ordinances?

"*Ans.* Let the preachers and people pursue the old plan as from the beginning.

"*Ques.* What alteration may we make in our original plan?

"*Ans.* Our next Conference will, if God permits, show us more clearly."[3]

This, no doubt, is substantially accurate, and, as will be seen, the sacramental question did come up at the next Conference.

[1] Nathan Bangs, Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, New York, 1832, p. 126; N. Bangs, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1857, Vol. I, p. 129.

[2] The Journal was in the possession of the Rev. C. Elliott, D. D.

[3] Leroy M. Lee, D. D., Life and Times of Rev. Jesse Lee, Nashville, 1860, p. 78.

Before that Conference convened, nearly all the remaining English preachers embarked for England. The British troops had landed on the 25th of August, 1777, at the head of Elk River, Maryland, and immediately marched northward, and entered Philadelphia in September. This appeared to be a favorable time for the departure of those who preferred their mother country; so about the middle of the latter month Mr. Rankin and Mr. Rodda sailed for Europe.[1]

Shadford and Asbury still tarried, but in a state of doubt. On the 21st of July, 1777, Mr. Asbury says: "Heard Mr. Rankin preach his last sermon. My mind was a little dejected, and I now felt some desire to return to England, but was willing to commit the matter to the Lord."[2] At last the day of final decision came. In the beginning of March, 1778, Shadford kept a day of private fasting and prayer with Mr. Asbury, in order to know the will of God;"[3] and Ezekiel Cooper tells us that, "after the season of fasting and prayer, Shadford concluded, and observed that he had an answer to leave the country and return to England; but Asbury, who received an answer to stay, replied, 'If you are called to go, I am called to stay; so we must part.'[4] From that moment," says Cooper, "he made America his country and his home."

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 62.
[2] Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, p. 190.
[3] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 64.
[4] Ezekiel Cooper, Funeral Discourse on the Death of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Superintendent or Senior Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, 1819, p. 32.

Shadford left the country, and Asbury, though he remained, was compelled to go into retirement. In 1777, his work being in Baltimore and vicinity, it was demanded that he take the oath of allegiance to the State of Maryland; but this, he held, he could not conscientiously do, and "the result was that he was obliged to leave the State and go to Delaware, where the State oath was not required of clergymen."[1] In the quaint language of Jesse Lee, "On the 5th day of March, Mr. Asbury began to lye by at Thomas White's, in the Delaware State, where he shut himself up."[2]

Asbury thus explains his retirement to Delaware:

"The reason of this retirement was as follows: From March 10, 1778, on conscientious principles I was a non-juror, and could not preach in the State of Maryland, and therefore withdrew to the Delaware State, where the clergy were not required to take the State oath, though with a clear conscience I could have taken the oath of the Delaware State had it been required, and would have done it had I not been prevented by a tender fear of hurting the scrupulous consciences of others. St. Paul saith: 'When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.' (1 Cor. viii, 12.)"[3]

During most of this period of seclusion, Asbury was entertained at the hospitable mansion of Judge White, in Kent County, Delaware; but part of the

[1] Rev. W. P. Strickland, Life of Francis Asbury, 1858, p. 112.
[2] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 64.
[3] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 208.

time he was compelled to seek shelter in more secluded places. The excited condition of the country, and the suspicion attaching to him because of his English birth, gave him great mental distress; as he says, on the 13th of March: "I was under some heaviness of mind. But it was no wonder,—three thousand miles from home, my friends have left me; I am considered by some as an enemy of the country; every day liable to be seized by violence, and abused. However, all this is but a trifle to suffer for Christ and the salvation of souls."[1]

All these facts have a very important bearing upon the ecclesiastical development of American Methodism. The war, causing the departure of Rankin and other leading English preachers and the retirement of Asbury, made a marked change in the conditions. Now there was not one preacher in the Conference who had been sent over by Mr. Wesley. His direct control was interrupted by the war, and the American preachers were left to themselves. The first period of the American Conferences had ended, and a new epoch had been reached.

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 205.

CHAPTER V.

THE AMERICAN CONFERENCES FROM 1778 TO 1781.

THE Sixth Annual Conference, and the first under the new conditions, was held in Leesburg, Virginia, May 19, 1778. As there was no general assistant of Mr. Wesley present, "Mr. William Watters, being the oldest American preacher, was called to the chair."[1] Heretofore, Mr. Rankin had presided and made the appointments as the representative of Mr. Wesley, and this was the first time for an American Conference to elect its presiding officer. In the printed Minutes, Mr. Watters is placed at the head of the assistants, no doubt on the ground of seniority and because of his election to the presidency of the Conference, so that his name appears in the same relative position as did that of Rankin in the Minutes of 1774. Mr. Asbury was not present at the Conference, and his name does not appear in the Minutes; but for the first time there appears the name of James O'Kelly, who was to play an important part in the future history of Methodism. New York, Philadelphia, Chester, Frederick, and Norfolk were, on account of the war, dropped out of the list of appointments for the time being. The printed Minutes show that the Second Question was changed from "What

[1] N. Bangs, Life of Freeborn Garrettson, 3d Ed., 1832, p. 126.

preachers are admitted on trial?" to "What preachers remain on trial?" Two or three new questions were introduced, namely:

"*Ques.* 6. Who shall act as general stewards?

"*Ans.* William Moore, Henry Fry.

"*Ques.* 7. What was done with the balance of the collection?

"*Ans.* Lodged with Henry Fry.

"*Ques.* 8. What shall the preachers be allowed for quarterage?

"*Ans.* Eight pounds Virginia currency."[1]

Lee explains the change in allowance from £6 Pennsylvania currency to the above amount. He says: "As paper money was much depreciated, the preachers concluded to allow each traveling preacher £8 Virginia money a quarter, or £32 per year."[2] Another fast-day was appointed.

This, in brief, is all the printed Minutes contain; but we have already ascertained that the printed Minutes do not always show everything that actually transpired, and so in this instance we conclude that possibly this was only a very brief summary. Further, when we remember how anxious the American Methodists had been to have the sacraments among themselves, but that they had been restrained by the English Minutes and the English preachers, we must think it surprising if, in this first Conference, when they were practically left to themselves, they said nothing at all upon the subject.

Other data demonstrate that the matter was before

[1] Printed Minutes for 1778.

[2] Jesse Lee, Hist. of Methodists, 1810, p. 63.

the Conference. It had been referred by the Conference of 1777 to the Conference of 1778. The Rev. Freeborn Garrettson states that the question, "Shall we administer the ordinances?" was again proposed. "I was present," says Mr. Garrettson, "and the answer was, 'Lay it over until the next Conference,' which was appointed to be held in Fluvanna County, Virginia, May 18, 1779, at what was called the Broken-back Church."[1] Philip Gatch says, in his journal, that the same question was again asked, and that it was answered: "We unanimously agree to refer it to the next Conference."[2]

As already observed, Asbury's name does not appear in the printed Minutes of 1778. As he did not receive an appointment to a charge and was not present at the session, he was considered to have ceased to be a member of the Conference. As opportunity afforded he preached from time to time, and as the danger gradually diminished he extended his tours.

Lednum remarks that, "about this time, Mr. Asbury heard some agreeable news, which probably was 'that a letter which he wrote to Mr. Rankin in 1777, in which he gave it as his opinion that the Americans would become a free and independent Nation, and that he was too much knit in affection to many of them to leave them, and that Methodist preachers had a great work to do under God in this country,' had fallen into the hands of the American

[1] N. Bangs, Life of Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, 3d Ed., 1832, p. 126; N. Bangs, Hist. of M. E. Church, Vol. I, p. 129.

[2] Leroy M. Lee, D. D., Life of Rev. Jesse Lee, 1860, p. 79.

officers, and had produced a great change in their opinions and feelings towards him. His excellency, Cæsar Rodney, governor of Delaware, aware of this, was quite favorable to him and the Methodists."[1]

The seclusion, however, had its good side; for, as his journals show, Asbury devoted his time to study and extensive reading that doubtless better fitted him for the exalted sphere he was to occupy. He records the fact that he read a great variety of standard works. In one entry he says: "I applied myself to the Greek and Latin Testament."[2] Perhaps it was this opportunity for study that led him to say: "Upon mature reflection I do not repent my late voluntary retirement in the State of Delaware."[3] And his new experience may have led him to see that the preacher of the Word needs time for general study and special preparation; for, about ten days after making the entry just quoted, he refers to the obstacles in the way of the Methodist preacher of that day who desired to study, and suggests that they ought to have spare time "for the purpose of improving themselves."[4]

Though in seclusion, he no doubt was kept well informed as to what was occurring in American Methodism. On the 30th of June, 1778, he says: "Brother F. G. [Freeborn Garrettson] came to see me."[5] This was a little more than a month after the Conference of 1778, and no doubt Mr. Garrettson fully acquainted

[1] Rev. John Lednum, Rise of Methodism in America, Philadelphia, 1859, p. 226.

[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 206. [3] *Id.*, p. 229. [4] *Id.*, p. 230. [5] *Id.*, p. 216.

him with all that had taken place at that session, and especially with the fact that at the next Conference the sacramental question was to be considered. His journal presents other indications that various items of information reached him from time to time, and in his moments of meditation he possibly matured plans for the future. That he thought there would be a brighter future for him seems more than probable. Thus, on the 30th day of March, 1779, he writes: "I then rode on to Brother Shaw's, where I heard agreeable news. Peradventure there is something in the womb of providence for which the Lord hath been preparing me by bringing me through fire and water."[1]

What was this pleasing news? What was this brighter anticipation? He does not say, but leaves us to whatever our imaginations may picture.

We are now on the eve of important events. It will be remembered that the Conference of 1778 ordered that the next Annual Conference should meet at Fluvanna, Virginia, on the 18th of May, yet on the 28th of April, 1779, twenty days before the time, we find a Conference meeting at Judge White's, the recent home of Asbury, in Kent County, Delaware.[2]

At once the reader will ask, Who called this Conference, and by what authority was the call issued? Legally, as matters then stood, no one but the Conference could fix the place for holding the Confer-

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 236.
[2] Printed Minutes, 1773-1813, p. 18; Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, p. 237.

ence. That being the case, no one man and no number of men had a legal right to go contrary to the order of the Conference. There was only a minority of the preachers at the Kent County meeting, so that it is plain this gathering was not at the request of the majority.

The fact that this Conference was held at Asbury's temporary home would lead to the inference that Asbury probably called or suggested it. Some other one may have originated the idea, but of this there is no proof. It is, however, certain that it was held at Judge White's for the convenience of Mr. Asbury. Mr. Asbury was not at the Conference of 1778, as it was not convenient for him to go out of the State of Delaware to attend the Conference to be held in Virginia that year.

There is no legal ground on which Mr. Asbury could at that time call a legal Conference. Even if Mr. Wesley's general assistant could change the time and place fixed for a Conference, neither Mr. Asbury nor any other man held this position at that time, and, therefore, no one had a right to make the change. Mr. Asbury was not even recognized as a member by the Conference of 1778; but whether he was or was not really a member, or whether he or some other preacher called this meeting of the preachers, it can not fairly be called the legal Annual Conference of the year; and if it is to be justified, it must be on other than strictly legal grounds.

Asbury gives the following account of the Conference in Delaware: "Our Conference for the Northern stations began at Thomas White's. All our preachers

on these stations were present, and united. We had much prayer, love, and harmony; and we all agreed to walk by the same rule and to mind the same thing. As we had great reason to fear that our brethren to the southward were in danger of separating from us, we wrote them a soft, healing epistle. On these Northern stations we have now about seventeen traveling preachers. We appointed our next Conference to be held in Baltimore town, the last Tuesday in April next."[1]

On Monday, May 3, 1779, he writes: "Yesterday we had some melting under the Word, at the house of E. White; and to-day I wrote to John Dickins, to Philip Gatch, Edward Dromgoole,[2] and William Glendenning, urging them, if possible, to prevent a separation among the preachers in the South—that is, Virginia and North Carolina—and I entertain great hopes that the breach will be healed; if not, the consequences may be bad."[3]

This, at first glance, must seem a surprising statement. He fears the brethren from the South are in danger of separating, and he writes certain parties to endeavor to prevent a separation; and yet these Northern preachers, who rally around Mr. Asbury, have practically withdrawn from the Southern preachers, and stand in the attitude of separatists. If they had all met together, and the Southerners had seceded, then the case would have been different; or even if all had met at the place legally designated,

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, pp. 237, 238.
[2] In Minutes, Drumgole; spelled by others Dromgoole.
[3] Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, p. 238.

and the Southerners, having a majority, had carried measures to which the Northern preachers were conscientiously opposed, and then the Northern minority withdrew on principle, the case would have been different. As it was, the so-called Northern preachers did not wait for the regular Conference, but met in advance, and then all who had responded to the invitation to attend the meeting at Judge White's absented themselves from the regular session. What is equally significant is, that they acted as though they were the legal Conference, and fixed the time and place for the next Conference. It should be observed at this point that the members of the Delaware Conference were Northerners merely in the sense that their charges were generally north of Virginia, for there were preachers from Delaware and Maryland in attendance.

The printed Minutes of the Kent County Conference show the following answer to the question, "Why was the Delaware Conference held?" "*Ans.* For the convenience of the preachers in the Northern stations, that we all might have an opportunity of meeting in Conference, it being unadvisable for Brother Asbury and Brother Ruff, with some others, to attend in Virginia; it is considered also as preparatory to the Conference in Virginia. Our sentiments to be given in by Brother Watters."[1]

So the Rev. Jesse Lee states that "the preachers in the Northern States held a preparatory Conference at Thomas White's, in Delaware State, in order that

[1] Printed Minutes, 1773-1813, p. 19.

their sentiments might be carried by Brother William Watters to the Conference in Virginia; for it was judged to be improper for Brother Asbury to leave his solitary retreat, to go to Virginia."[1]

Originally it may have been thought that it would be a preparatory Conference; but it acted as though it was the legal Conference, and treated the other as a seceding body. It might be called a preparatory meeting of a portion of the preachers, if, after coming to a conclusion as to their proper attitude on the sacramental question, they had then gone on to Fluvanna and taken their places in the regularly ordered session. Instead of that, they transacted business as the Conference, fixed the time and place for their next annual session, received their appointments, and went to their charges, satisfying themselves with sending a letter and a messenger to the regular Conference in Virginia.

The convenience of Mr. Asbury or any other individual preacher was not enough to justify such a course; and at that time Asbury had no rank higher than that of the majority of the preachers.

The student of history can not resist the conclusion that this so-called Conference was held because it was known that the legal Conference would consider the sacramental question, and it was believed the majority would authorize the preachers to administer the sacraments to their own people. It was, so to speak, a flank movement to consolidate those who were opposed to this action, and regarding the Fluvanna session as the regular Conference, the call for

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 67.

this meeting was of a revolutionary character, while the whole movement suggests Asbury's acute management.

The only justification for such a course was in the supposed necessity for such an act in order to preserve the unity of Wesleyan Methodism. Asbury held that Wesley was the head of American as well as British Methodism; and, therefore, that it was the duty of the Americans to adhere to Wesley's teachings and the agreement of the first American Conference, which was to receive the sacraments from the Church of England clergymen.

As Asbury and those who met in Conference with him at Judge White's held these views, they looked upon themselves as the true Wesleyan Methodists, and considered those who were in favor of having the sacraments from the Methodist preachers as being "in danger of separating" from them.

Still the Northern preachers erred in acting before the regular Conference had convened and decided. Admitting that it was right for them to hold their "preparatory Conference," or caucus, to decide upon a policy, they should then have gone to the regular Conference, and, as members of that body, expressed their views, and endeavored to persuade others to agree with them. No one can tell what might have been the effect. The result of subsequent negotiations suggest, that they might have succeeded; but if they had failed, then they would have had stronger reasons for forming a new Conference. As it was, they took the surest way to precipitate the very

action they deprecated; for by their absence they left the May Conference overwhelmingly under the influence of those who favored the change.

With one exception, all the preachers who attended the meeting in Delaware absented themselves from the regular Conference; and, "under these circumstances, the Virginia Conference complained that an illegal Conference had been held, to keep as many of the Northern preachers from the session as possible, lest they should join with them in adopting the ordinances."[1]

They anticipated the action, and practically seceded before the deed was done; and their only defense is in the fact that they adhered to Wesley and the English Minutes and to the former agreement of the American Conference.

The printed Minutes of this "so-called"[2] preparatory Conference contain much that is exceedingly interesting. For the first time we find the question, "Who desist from traveling?" The following conclusions were reached, namely:

"No helper to make any alteration in the circuit, or appoint preaching in any new place, without consulting the assistant."

"Every exhorter and local preacher to go by the directions of the assistants where, and only where, they shall appoint."

Question 11 was, "What shall be done with the children?" and to this the answer was: "Meet them

[1] Leroy M. Lee, Life of Jesse Lee, 1860, pp. 81 and 82.
[2] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, p. 67.

once a fortnight, and examine the parents with regard to their conduct toward them."

Question 10 was the key to at least part of the reason for the assembling of these preachers. It was: "Shall we guard against a separation from the Church, directly or indirectly?" The answer given was: "By all means."

The 12th and 13th questions are the most important and suggestive. Question 12 was: "Ought not Brother Asbury to act as general assistant in America?" The answer was: "He ought: 1st. On account of his age; 2d. Because originally appointed by Mr. Wesley; 3d. Being joined with Messrs. Rankin and Shadford by express order from Mr. Wesley."

This was a good deal for this "preparatory Conference" to do. It only contained about one-third of the American preachers; and it is not clear that, if all the preachers had met together in Conference, they would have taken precisely this action. Mr. Asbury was the senior, and, as such, would have been respected. He had been appointed assistant by Mr. Wesley; but in a short time he was superseded by the appointment of Mr. Rankin as general assistant, which title Mr. Asbury had never borne; and, as we have seen, Asbury had been recalled to England by Mr. Wesley. As Dr. Stevens remarks on the 3d part of the answer, "The last reason is ambiguous."[1]

This meeting practically elected Mr. Asbury general assistant, and he thus became the head of a section of the American preachers. Possibly this was

[1] A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. II, p 57

part of the "agreeable news" he had heard on the 30th of March. The most remarkable act, however, is to be found in the answer to the 13th question: "How far shall his power extend?" This query as to his power was answered as follows:

"On hearing every preacher for and against what is in debate, the right of determination shall rest with him, according to the Minutes;"[1] that is to say, "The Large Minutes" collated by Wesley. Bangs, commenting on this action, says: "It seems, therefore, that they were not in the habit, at that time, of determining debatable questions by a majority of votes; but, in imitation of the practice of Mr. Wesley, after hearing all that could be said *pro* and *con*, the presiding officer decided the point."[2] These "Northern" preachers had thus placed themselves under the absolute control of Mr. Asbury, not only as to their appointments, but also as to Conference action. They might debate questions, but he, and he only, had the power to decide. It was apparently a voluntary submission to personal government at a time when the circumstances of their isolation from Wesley, and the Declaration of Independence on the part of the Colonies, rendered it possible for them to take the government into their own hands.

In answer to the sixth question, "Who of the preachers are willing to take the station this Conference shall place them in, and continue till next

[1] Printed Minutes, 1773-1813, p. 20.

[2] N. Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 1857, 10th Ed., Vol. I, pp. 131 and 132.

Conference?"[1] sixteen preachers said that they would. This was a new question, and evidently was part of the process of consolidating the Northern preachers in view of the probable dissent of the regular Conference. Another act of the same character was appointing their next Annual Conference to be held in Baltimore on the last Tuesday of the next April. May was the regular month for the holding of the regular Conference, and fixing April for this new body was to effectually prevent the coalescence of its members with the majority, who met in the regular Conference. So this irregular Conference acted as the legal Conference, and treated the regularly called Conference as separatists in advance of their taking any action, and also made such arrangements as insured a permanent division, unless the majority yielded to their views. In a little while the time arrived for the holding of the regular Conference, which convened at the Broken-back Church, in Fluvanna County, Virginia, on the 18th of May, 1779. This, Lee speaks of as the "seventh Conference," counting the one in Delaware as a "preparatory Conference."[2]

The Rev. William Watters, who attended the Delaware meeting, also attended the Conference in Virginia. Watters received "no notice" of the proposed Conference at Judge White's, but hearing of it indirectly, he "determined, if possible," to get there, "though in a very weak state of health," in order

[1] Minutes, 1773-1813, p. 18.
[2] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, p. 67.

that he might persuade "Asbury to attend the regularly appointed Conference, to be held on the 18th of May, 1779, in Fluvanna County."[1] If Watters knew nothing of the proposed Conference with Asbury by direct notification, it is probable that others received "no notice" of it, and that only those were invited who were known to agree on the main principle involved. He did not succeed in inducing Mr. Asbury to attend the legal Conference, but was specially commissioned to communicate to the Virginia Conference the "sentiments" of the Delaware meeting, "as a kind of protest against the adoption of any measures"[2] in favor of administering the sacraments. Mr. Watters was the only preacher who attended both Conferences. He had been elected the year before to preside over the Conference, because he was the senior preacher. Whether he presided this year we do not know; but it is significant that the printed Minutes of the Fluvanna Conference place his name last in the list of assistants, and put the name of James O'Kelly first, while in the list in Asbury's Conference of the next year the name of William Watters stands next to that of Asbury. The explanation is evident. Mr. Watters did not approve of the action taken by the Virginia Conference, and so lost his popularity in the one and gave his adherence to the other.

This Conference was composed of over two-thirds

[1] Watters's Life, p. 72; A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. II, pp. 60, 61.

[2] Leroy M. Lee, Life of Jesse Lee, p. 81.

of the preachers in America, and it covered twice as many charges as were represented at Judge White's. It was, therefore, not only the legal, but, at the same time, the representative Conference. The printed Minutes of both Conferences mention Baltimore and Frederick, with the names of the same preachers. The printed Minutes of the Conference held at Fluvanna contain four new questions. The first question was changed from "What preachers are admitted this year?" to "Who are admitted on trial?" It was asked, "What shall be done with the preachers who were upon trial last year?" and it was answered, "To be continued till next Conference." Lee says: "Before this Conference, it had been a constant practice to take a preacher upon trial for one year only, and then admit him into full connection. But from that time it has been a constant practice, even to the present day, to keep a young preacher on trial for two years at least before he is admitted into full connection; and at the expiration of two years, if the Conference have doubts concerning the piety, gifts, or usefulness of the preacher, they continue him on trial for three years, or a longer time, as they may judge best."[1]

"Shall any preacher receive quarterage who is able to travel and does not?" was answered, "No." "In what light shall we view those preachers who receive money by subscription?" was answered, "As excluded from the Methodist connection."[2]

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 68.
[2] Printed Minutes, 1773-1813, p. 22.

Strange to say, the most important thing done at that Conference is not mentioned in the printed Minutes. The Rev. Freeborn Garrettson says: "In May, 1779, the regular Conference was held, according to appointment, in the Broken-back Church, Fluvanna County, Virginia. The question, "Shall we administer the ordinances?" was again agitated, and was answered in the affirmative. Some of the oldest preachers were, therefore, set apart to administer the sacraments. The troubles were such that we of the North did not attend."[1]

Philip Gatch, who was an active participant in the exciting scenes of this period, preserved in his manuscript journal quite a full account of this action. In it he records the following questions and answers:

"*Ques.* 14. What are our reasons for taking up the administration of the ordinances among us?

"*Ans.* Because the Episcopal establishment is now dissolved, and, therefore, in almost all our circuits the members are without the ordinances—we believe it to be our duty.

"*Ques.* 15. What preachers do approve of this step?

"*Ans.* Isham Tatum, Charles Hopkins, Nelson Reed, Reuben Ellis, P. Gatch, Thomas Morris, James Morris, James Foster, John Major, Andrew Yeargan, Henry Willis, Francis Poythress, John Sigman, Leroy Cole, Carter Cole, James O'Kelly, William Moore, Samuel Roe.

"*Ques.* 16. Is it proper to have a committee?

"*Ans.* Yes, and by the vote of the preachers.

"*Ques.* 17. Who are the committee?

"*Ans.* P. Gatch, James Foster, L. Cole, and R. Ellis.

"*Ques.* 18. What powers do the preachers vest in the committee?

"*Ans.* They do agree to observe all the resolutions of the

[1] Garrettson's Semi-centennial Sermon.

said committee, so far as the said committee shall adhere to the Scriptures.

"*Ques.* 19. What form of ordination shall be observed to authorize any preacher to administer?

"*Ans.* By that of a presbytery.

"*Ques.* 20. How shall the presbytery be appointed?

"*Ans.* By a majority of the preachers.

"*Ques.* 21. Who are the presbytery?

"*Ans.* P. Gatch, R. Ellis, James Foster, and, in case of necessity, Leroy Cole.

"*Ques.* 22. What power is vested in the presbytery by this choice?

"*Ans.* 1. To administer the ordinances themselves. 2. To authorize any other preacher or preachers, approved of by them, by the form of laying on of hands.

"*Ques.* 23. What is to be observed as touching the administration of the ordinances, and to whom shall they be administered?

"*Ans.* To those who are under our care and discipline.

"*Ques.* 24. Shall we rebaptize any under our care?

"*Ans.* No.

"*Ques.* 25. What mode shall be adopted for the administration of baptism?

"*Ans.* Either sprinkling or plunging, as the parent or adult shall choose.

"*Ques.* 26. What ceremony shall be used in the administration?

"*Ans.* Let it be according to our Lord's command (Matt. xxviii, 19), short and extempore.

"*Ques.* 27. Shall the sign of the cross be used?

"*Ans.* No.

"*Ques.* 28. Who shall receive the charge of the child, after baptism, for its future instruction?

"*Ans.* The parent or persons who have the care of the child, with advice from the preacher.

"*Ques.* 29. What mode shall be adopted for the administration of the Lord's Supper?

"*Ans.* Kneeling is thought the most proper; but, in cases of conscience, may be left to the choice of the communicant.

"*Ques.* 30. What ceremony shall be observed in this ordinance?

"*Ans.* After singing, praying, and exhortation, the preacher delivers the bread, saying, 'The body of our Lord Jesus Christ,' etc., after the Church order."[1]

There are a number of points in the action just quoted that call for special attention. In the first place it will be observed that this Conference does not concur in the action of the Delaware meeting, in recognizing Mr. Asbury as general assistant. There can be no doubt that Mr. Watters conveyed full information as to the doings of the preachers at Judge White's, but the regular Conference at Fluvanna did not even record Mr. Asbury's name, much less concede to him any authority as Wesley's general assistant. On the contrary, this Conference decided that it was "proper to have a committee," and that the committee should be elected "by the vote of the preachers." Heretofore they had been governed by Wesley's agent until they called Mr. Watters to the chair, the previous year. Now being isolated from Wesley, and, in some sense, left to govern themselves, they commit the government, not to one man, but to a committee of four men—namely, Gatch, Foster, Cole, and Ellis—and at the same time they put limitations on the powers vested in the committee, and reserve to the Conference the right of judgment and power of dissent, agreeing "to observe all the resolutions of the said committee, so far as the said committee shall adhere to the Scriptures."

[1] Gatch's Manuscript Journal; Leroy M. Lee's Life of Jesse Lee 1860, pp. 79–81.

This was an early effort at Conference government through a committee, and is, perhaps, an outgrowth of the suggestion made in the preliminary meeting of preachers in 1777, and a modification of Mr. Wesley's plan of 1769. This did not imply any absolute breaking away from Wesley and the Large Minutes, but merely a temporary arrangement under circumstances which would not permit Wesley to govern directly.

The sacramental matter, however, placed them in a different attitude. They decided to ordain some of their preachers, and they presented, in justification, the fact that the Revolutionary War and the Declaration of Independence had dissolved the Church of England in the United States, and that nearly all their people were without the privilege of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and that there were scarcely any to baptize their children. These preachers were *de facto* ministers of the gospel, and the members of the Methodist societies regarded them as ministers *de jure*. The law of necessity asserted itself, and these men, who were recognized as duly called to preach, and who had been formally set apart from business pursuits to devote their lives to the ministry, felt that, under the circumstances, being called to preach, they were entitled to administer the sacraments.

As Lee puts it, "Many of our traveling preachers in Virginia and North Carolina, seeing and feeling the want of the instituted means of grace among our societies (and there being but few Church ministers in that part of the country, and most of them strangers

to heart-felt religion), concluded that if God had called them to preach, he had called them also to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper."[1] Having discussed this point in "The Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism,"[2] we refer but briefly to the reasons advanced in defense of the action of the Conference.

They did not propose episcopal but presbyterial ordination, and so they formed a presbytery, consisting of Gatch, Ellis and Foster, and, "in case of necessity, Leroy Cole," the same persons as constituted the committee; four being named, probably, so that at least three would take part in each ordination. The Conference empowered this presbytery to "administer the ordinances" and to ordain others. They were among the oldest preachers, and therefore literally elders, and now formally called presbyters by the Conference.

It will be noticed that the purpose was to provide the sacraments for those under their own care and discipline, and that liberality of view was expressed as to the mode of baptism and the form of partaking of the communion; but the form of words to be employed were to be those of the Anglican service.

Lee tells us that "the committee thus chosen first ordained themselves, and then proceeded to ordain and set apart other preachers for the same purpose, that they might administer the holy ordinances to the Church of Christ. The preachers thus ordained, went forth

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 69.

[2] The Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism, by Rev. T. B. Neely, Ph. D., D. D.; published, New York, Phillips and Hunt; Cincinnati, Cranston and Stowe; 12mo., pp. 448.

preaching the gospel in their circuits as formerly, and administered the sacraments wherever they went, provided the people were willing to partake with them."[1] By this act the regular Conference certainly broke away from Wesley's restrictions and the teachings of the Large Minutes on this point, and, therefore, though the Conference believed it was justified by the circumstances, there was now some ground for Asbury's allegation that they were separatists. Asbury's Conference was a secession from the regular Conference, in anticipation of a probable decision; but the regular Conference had in this one particular departed from the wishes of Mr. Wesley. While they still considered themselves Methodists and in connection with Mr. Wesley, they had practically formed a temporary Presbyterian Church. The Fluvanna Conference directed that the next session be held at Manakintown, Va., on the 8th of May, 1780, so that now there were really two Conferences, a Northern and a Southern, which divided upon the sacramental question; but the Conference to be held in Virginia was the regular successor of the legal Conference of 1779. It also represented a large majority of the preachers and people, though Asbury's section might claim a closer adherence to Wesley and his wishes. Strictly speaking, the Conference held in Virginia was the seventh regular American Conference, while Asbury's Conference was irregular, if not absolutely illegal, in every sense of the term, whatever may have been the principles which led to the call. As related to general American Meth-

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, p. 69.

odism, it was, at least for the time being, a faction and a revolt against the majority, even if its views were correct. As it was, American Methodism was divided. The Northern section refused to administer the sacraments, and was governed by Asbury, whose authority was absolute. The Southern section had the sacraments, and was governed by a committee selected by the Conference. The former might have been called conservatives; the latter, radicals or progressives.

The time for the Conference of 1780 approaches, and with it comes a re-discussion of the differences between the two bodies. On the 1st of April, 1780, Asbury makes this record: "I received a satisfactory letter from William Moore; he hopes a reconciliation will take place in Virginia if healing measures are adopted."[1] This was an olive-branch from the South; for William Moore was a member of the Conference which met at Fluvanna.[2] Asbury was still in Delaware, but actively engaged. On the 12th and 14th of April he notes that he is employed in preparing his papers for Conference. He had become a citizen of the State of Delaware,[3] and concludes that he may venture out of the territory to which he had been confined, so on the 20th he "set off for Baltimore." When he reached Mr. Gough's, in Baltimore County, he met William Glendenning, and observes that "Brother Glendenning had his objections to make,

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 277.
[2] Minutes.
[3] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 281.

and pleaded some in favor of the Virginia brethren who had made a division."[1] So he still puts the burden on the "Virginia brethren," whereas they met in the regular Conference, and his section of the preachers did not attend the regular Conference, but formed a Conference of their own, and so withdrew from the connection with the regular Conference before it committed any overt act. From this point of view Asbury's party made the division. They separated from the Conference, though the regular American Conference departed from Wesley's instructions and from its original resolution of 1773. On the 24th of April, Asbury "made a plan for the appointment of the preachers," "received three epistles from the Jerseys, soliciting three or four preachers," and the same day reached Baltimore.[2] The printed Minutes state that Asbury's Conference convened in the city of Baltimore on the 24th of April, 1780; but the 24th was Monday, and the Conference had been appointed for "the last Tuesday in April."[3] Further, Asbury enters in his journal, under date of Tuesday, 25th: "Our Conference met in peace and love." We must conclude, therefore, that although the preachers may have reached Baltimore on the 24th, they did not enter upon their business until the 25th day of April. Lee calls this the eighth Conference."[4] But in this he is inconsistent, for he does not count the Delaware Conference of the pre-

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, pp. 280.
[2] *Id.* pp. 280, 281.
[3] *Id.* p, 288.
[4] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, p. 70.

vious year as anything more than a preparatory Conference called for convenience, which was the progenitor of this Baltimore session, while he speaks of the Conference of Fluvanna as "the Seventh Conference."[1]

If the Fluvanna Conference was the regular Conference, and the seventh in order, then the Conference by it regularly appointed would be its regular successor, and be properly termed the eighth Conference, while the Conference at Baltimore was simply the successor of an irregular meeting, which Lee could not count as a Conference at all.

Nevertheless the Northern section has grown considerably during the year, and gives promise of becoming the leading Conference. The year before, Baltimore was counted in the lists of both Conferences. This year it appears only in Asbury's Conference. According to the printed Minutes, the same is true of Frederick. The same is true of the preachers at both places, with the exception that William Adams, who, on Asbury's list of 1779, was assigned to Baltimore, this year appears in the Virginia list, while Philip Adams appears to have left the latter Conference and connected himself with Asbury's. Berkley was the previous year only on the Southern list; this year the charge, as well as its preachers—John Tunnell and John Hagerty—have come to the Northern Conference. In 1779, at Asbury's Conference, seven charges, including Baltimore and Frederick, were named; while at the regular Confer-

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, p. 67.

ence held at Fluvanna there were fourteen circuits, including the two places claimed in common. In 1780, Asbury gained two circuits; so that, counting New Jersey and Philadelphia as two, for they had been divided, he now had ten charges; while the Southern Conference, according to the printed Minutes, had dropped to ten. So the Minutes show that this year Asbury gave twenty-two men appointments, while the Southern Conference assigned twenty. There may be some qualifying facts on the one side or the other, but it is manifest that Asbury was getting a stronger hold. The fact that he was the senior preacher, and that he had been sent to America by Wesley, had very much to do with this; but something must be attributed to the cautious spirit of the Northern preachers, and a doubt as to the propriety of administering the sacraments without Wesley's consent.

The first question that was asked was: "What preachers do now agree to sit in Conference on the original plan as Methodists?" The "original plan" was expressed in the resolution of the first Conference, which was held in 1773: "Every preacher who acts in connection with Mr. Wesley and the brethren who labor in America, is strictly to avoid administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper."

Thus the seceding body, which had been irregularly called and had broken away from the majority of the previous year, placed itself formally upon the basis of the first Conference, claiming that

to be the only Methodistic course, and practically declaring that the preachers who did not agree with them were not Methodists. The printed Minutes give the names of twenty-four preachers as responding to this question in the affirmative.

The Virginia preachers believed that their course was necessitated by existing conditions, but they did not desire a division in American Methodism. To help prevent a permanent division, two of their number—Philip Gatch and Reuben Ellis—appeared at Asbury's Conference, and endeavored "to prevent a total disunion;"[1] but they found little encouragement and no sympathy. They complained that the Northern brethren dealt "hardly with them," and that "there was little appearance of anything but an entire separation." To this charge, however, they made one exception, declaring that Mr. Watters "was the only one that treated them with affection and tenderness." The fact is that Asbury and his followers looked upon the others as having departed from the faith and practice of the Wesleyan Methodists, and that in this they were not to be tolerated. Asbury, under date of "Tuesday, 25th," gives the following brief account of his Conference:

"We settled all our Northern stations; then we began in much debate about the letter sent from Virginia. We first concluded to renounce them. Then I offered conditions of union:

"I. That they should ordain no more.

[1] Life of Wm. Watters, pp. 79–81.

"II. That they should come no further than Hanover Circuit.

"III. That we would have our delegates in their Conference.

"IV. That they should not presume to administer the ordinances where there is a decent Episcopal minister.

"V. To have a Union Conference.

"These would not do, as we found upon long debate, and we came back to our determinations; although it was like death to think of parting. At last a thought struck my mind, to propose a suspension of the ordinances for one year, and so cancel all our grievances and be one. It was agreed on both sides; and Philip Gatch and Reuben Ellis, that had been very stiff, came into it, and thought it would do." On the 27th he writes: "Joseph Cromwell and Freeborn Garrettson spoke. At the recommendation of the Conference, William Watters, too. These three volunteered, and were to be my spokesmen. Myself and Brother Garrettson are going to the Virginia Conference to bring about peace and union."[1]

The Minutes state that Asbury, Garrettson, and Watters were appointed to visit the Conference in Virginia.

At this point we should quote the whole of the action of the Conference on the sacramental question and the division, as given in the printed Minutes. It

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 261.

is continued in the following questions and answers:

"*Ques.* 12. Shall we continue in close connection with the Church, and press our people to a closer communion with her?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 13. Will this Conference grant the privilege to all the friendly clergy of the Church of England, at the request or desire of the people, to preach or administer the ordinances in our preaching-houses or chapels?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 20. Does this whole Conference disapprove the step our brethren have taken in Virginia?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 21. Do we look upon them no longer as Methodists in connection with Mr. Wesley and us till they come back?

"*Ans.* Agreed.

"*Ques.* 22. Shall Brothers Asbury, Garrettson, and Watters attend the Virginia Conference, and inform them of our proceedings in this, and receive their answer?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 26. What must be the conditions of our union with our Virginia brethren?

"*Ans.* To suspend all their administrations for one year, and all meet together in Baltimore."

Thus it will be seen that the seceding body assumes practically to excommunicate the members of the regular Conference.

Asbury's followers not only disapprove of the action of the majority in the legal Conference of the previous year, but also declare they will not look upon those who remained in the regular Conference "as Methodists in connection with Mr. Wesley"

and themselves, "till they come back;" and the ultimatum was that they should suspend "their administrations for one year, and all meet together in Baltimore." In other words, it was demanded that those who had not withdrawn from the regular Conference should come to the seceders and accept their terms. Not only did Asbury's Conference do that, but it also emphasized the idea of "closer communion" with the Church of England, and of taking the sacraments from her clergy, notwithstanding the fact that the English State Church had been badly shattered, and that very few of its clergy were left in the country.[1]

This covers the action of the Northern Conference upon this particular point; but there were other questions considered by this body. Thus the proper settlement and care of the chapel property brought out the following question and answer:

"*Ques.* 7. Ought not all the assistants to see to the settling of all the preaching-houses by trustees, and order the said trustees to meet once in half a year, and keep a register of their proceedings; if there are any vacancies, choose new trustees for the better security of the houses; and let all the deeds be drawn, in substance, after that in the printed Minutes?

"*Ans.* Yes."

Or as Mr. Lee states it: "That all the assistants should see to the settling of all our meeting-houses by trustees, and for regular deeds to be taken for the houses."[2]

---

[1] See Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism, pp. 149-157.

[2] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, p. 71.

It was decided that "all the traveling preachers" should "take a license from every Conference, importing that they are assistants or helpers in connection with us;" which appears to mean Asbury's Conference, and the certificate was to bear the signature of Mr. Asbury. As to the local preachers and exhorters, it was strictly enjoined "that no one presume to speak in public without taking a note every quarter (if required)," and "that they be examined by the assistant with respect to his life, his qualification, and reception."

The following question and answer, given at this Conference, might not be so popular or supposed to be necessary to-day:

"*Ques.* 11. Ought not all our preachers to make conscience of rising at four, and, if not, yet at five (is it not a shame for a preacher to be in bed till six in the morning)?

"*Ans.* Undoubtedly they ought."

It was decided that the wives of married preachers should "receive an equivalent with their husbands in quarterage, if they stand in need." It was declared that "our preachers, if possible," should "speak to every person, one by one, in the families where they lodge, before prayer, if time will permit, or give a family exhortation after reading a chapter."

The Conference took a stand upon the temperance question, and asked:

"*Ques.* 23. Do we disapprove of the practice of distilling grain into liquor? Shall we disown our friends who will not renounce the practice?

"*Ans.* Yes."

On the question of slavery this Northern Conference, which extended into Maryland and other slave territory, entered its protest, "anticipating its abolition in Massachusetts by three years, in Rhode Island and Connecticut by four years; the thesis of Clarkson before the University of Cambridge, by five years; and the Ordinance of Congress against it in the Northwestern Territory, by seven years."[1]

The action appears in these interrogatories and replies:

"*Ques.* 16. Ought not this Conference to require those traveling preachers who hold slaves, to give promises to set them free?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 17. Does this Conference acknowledge that slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society, contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion, and doing that which we would not others should do to us and ours? Do we pass our disapprobation on all our friends who keep slaves, and advise their freedom?

"*Ans.* Yes."

The following question and answer appear to have been something of a concession to existing conditions:

"*Ques.* 25. Ought not the assistant to meet the colored people himself, and appoint as helpers in his absence proper white persons, and not suffer them to stay late and meet by themselves?

"*Ans.* Yes."

This probably gave the preachers an opportunity to preach to the slaves without exciting the suspicion of their owners, who even at that day did not know

[1] A. Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865, Vol. II, p. 78.

what schemes might be resorted to by the slaves for the purpose of gaining their freedom. The Conference recommended that the quarterly meetings "be held on Saturdays and Sundays, when convenient," and that "the Friday following every quarter-day be appointed as a day of fasting." Lee mentions that in the early days "it was customary to have the quarterly meeting on Tuesday, and to preach, settle their business, and hold a love-feast, and sometimes a watch-night. After a while it became a custom, in country places, for the quarterly meeting to continue for two days together. After further trial, it was thought best to have the quarterly meetings on Saturday and Sunday, which is now the constant practice in most places. One weighty reason for this plan was that many of the slaves could not attend these meetings except on the Lord's-day; another reason was that many of the wealthy people would come to hear us on the Sabbath, at such meetings, who would not be at the trouble of coming to meeting on any other day; and, lastly, many of the poor people—especially those of our own society—could not spare time or procure horses to come to such meetings, unless they were on the Sabbath."[1]

One of the questions called out one of the most important decisions of the Conference. Mr. Asbury was then their absolute head, but he might die, or he might not be able to attend the Conference session. Provision, therefore, was made for this possibility.

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 42.

"*Ques.* 24. What shall the Conference do in case of Brother Asbury's death or absence?

"*Ans.* Meet once a year, and act according to the Minutes."[1]

This provided for the perpetuity of Asbury's Conference, with the agreement that they would adhere to the "Large Minutes" as their written law; so that, even if Asbury was taken away, the Northern Conference would not blend with the Southern if, in their judgment, it implied an act contrary to the "Minutes."

The Conference at Baltimore has ended, and our minds turn to the eighth regular Conference, which was to meet in Virginia. On the 1st of May Asbury writes in his journal: "I am going to Virginia." On the 4th he says: "Prepared some papers for Virginia Conference. I go with a heavy heart, and fear the violence of a party of positive men"—a rather peculiar remark from one of the most positive of men. On the 5th Asbury came to the home of a Mr. Arnold, and he says: "We found the plague was begun; the good man Arnold was warm for the ordinances." On the 7th he remarks: "On entering into Virginia, I have prepared some papers for the Conference, and expect trouble." On Monday, the 8th, he says: "We rode to Granger's, fifteen miles; stopped, and fed our horses. These people are full of the ordinances. We talked and prayed with them, then rode on to the Manakintown ferry, much fatigued with the ride; went to friend Smith's, where all the preachers

[1] Printed Minutes, 1773-1813, pp. 23-26.

were met. I conducted myself with cheerful freedom, but found there was a separation in heart and practice. I spoke with my countryman, John Dickins, and found him opposed to our continuance in union with the Episcopal Church. Brothers Watters and Garrettson tried their men, and found them inflexible."[1] So it seems that the work had been systematized, and each of the three was to see and endeavor to influence particular parties; but the private attempt resulted in failure. This is not surprising, nor is the fact astonishing that the first appeal in the Conference was doomed to disappointment. The Virginia Conference was the regular Conference in order of succession, and this particular session had been ordered by a large majority of the American ministers. Its members had strong convictions, and believed that their course was justified by the law of necessity and the needs of the people to whom they ministered. In its membership we find John Dickins, whose fame lives to this day. Born in London in 1746, and educated partly in London and partly at the famous Eton College, he came to America some time before the Revolutionary War. He joined the Methodists in America in 1774, and became a regular preacher in 1777. This cultured man, with his knowledge of Latin, Greek, and mathematics, as well as other branches of the learning of that day, was a great intellectual force among the American Methodists; and, with his broad views, did very much to expand the work and enlarge the influence

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, pp. 282, 283.

of Methodism in the new nation. It was this man who, a little later in this very year, framed a subscription paper for a seminary on the plan of Wesley's Kingswood School, thus starting the first project of a literary institution among the American Methodists; and to this classical scholar is conceded the honor of founding, a few years later, the great Methodist Book Concern.

About a month after this Conference, Asbury, under date of Sunday, June 18, 1780, mentions meeting John Dickins in North Carolina, and says: "Brother Dickins spoke on charity very sensibly, but his voice is gone; he reasons too much; is a man of great piety, great skill in learning, drinks in Greek and Latin swiftly; yet prays much, and walks close with God. He is a gloomy countryman of mine, and very diffident of himself." The next day he writes: "Brother Dickins drew the subscription for a Kingswood School in America; this was what came out a college in the subscription printed by Dr. Coke."[1] This was one of the leading preachers in the Virginia Conference with whom Asbury and his companions had to deal.

Then there was Reuben Ellis, whom the Conference Minutes, after his death in 1796, pronounced a man of "very sure and solid parts, both as a counselor and guide; in his preaching weighty and powerful; a man of simplicity and godly sincerity;" and expressed "a doubt whether there be one left in

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, p. 291.

all the connection of higher, if of equal, standing, piety, and usefulness."

Another was James O'Kelly, one of the strongest characters in early Methodism. Lee says: "The most influential preachers in that separation in favor of the ordinances were Philip Gatch, John Dickins, and James O'Kelly. These men," he says, "were much respected for their usefulness in the ministry."[1] But besides these there were other men of note, of whom we can not make particular mention.

To come to such a Conference with a demand which was the next thing to an unconditional surrender, and expect an easy task, was absurd, and, as we will see, the mission was beset with many difficulties.

Unfortunately the data in regard to the proceedings of this Conference session are scant, excepting that which comes from Asbury's side of the question. However, there is no reason for doubting the accuracy of the statements which come to us from this source; but it would be interesting to have the story from the other side for purposes of comparison.

One of Asbury's companions, Freeborn Garrettson, gives us in his Autobiography, written about 1790, a brief account of this affair in the following language: "The Methodists being only a society, which were mostly united (with regard to communion) to the Church of England; and her ministers (especially in Virginia and Carolina) in the time of the war were

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, p. 78.

dispersed, so that a large body of people, under the name of Methodists, were in a great measure destitute of the ordinances of the Lord's house. In this case what was to be done? Our dear Virginia brethren thought it expedient to form themselves into a Church, and have the ordinances among them, which they did in the year 1779. But it was contrary to the minds of the preachers to the North.

"In April, 1780, we held a Conference in Baltimore, at which Brother F. A. [Francis Asbury], Brother W. W. [William Watters], and myself thought proper to visit our brethren at the South; and after a tedious journey of several hundred miles, we arrived safe in Manakintown, where we found the brethren in Conference, fully persuaded in their minds that the Lord required us to be a separate Church. We for a considerable time conferred together, and much of the divine presence was among us. On both sides it was painful to part. This the great Governor of the Church would not permit, for when the help of man failed he interposed his omnipotent arm and convinced our brethren that they ought at least to accede to a suspension of the ordinances for one year, till the founder of our society, Mr. John Wesley, could be consulted."[1]

It thus appears that Mr. Garrettson, and probably many others, understood that the ministers in the Virginia Conference had formed themselves into a Church, and that, after a year's experience in administering the sacraments, they were still "fully persuaded

[1] Freeborn Garrettson's Autobiography, pp. 161, 162.

in their minds that the Lord required" them "to be a separate Church."

In this hour of earnest solicitation on the one side, and determined resistance on the other, a sort of mediator appeared in the person of Edward Dromgoole. Mr. Dromgoole was born in Sligo, Ireland, about 1751. His peculiar name, according to his grandson, was derived from Drom, a mountain, and Goole, a clan, and, meaning a mountain clan, has been traced back through hundreds of years of Irish history to its early origin among the clans of Finland.[1] Mr. Dromgoole was a Roman Catholic until, when approaching manhood, he renounced popery and became a Methodist. In May, 1770, he sailed for America, and, after arriving in Baltimore the following August, he settled at Frederick, Maryland. Having a letter for Robert Strawbridge, his fellow-countryman,[2] he heard him preach, and thus came in contact with the man who had so much to do in bringing on the sacramental controversy. He began to preach in 1773, and in 1774 he was sent to the Baltimore Circuit as Shadford's colleague. His grandson, Edward Dromgoole, Esq., of Brunswick County, Va., says that "as soon as the war broke out he took the oath of allegiance to his adopted country, and carefully preserved the certificate thereof as a testimonial of his fidelity to the American cause."[3]

[1] John Atkinson, D. D., Centennial History of American Methodism, New York, 1884, p. 377.

[2] J. Lednum, History of Methodism in America, Philadelphia, 1859, p. 133.

[3] J. Atkinson, D. D., Centennial History of American Methodism, p. 378.

Mr. Dromgoole's name appears at irregular intervals in the Minutes, evidently from the fact that he took appointments irregularly because he married in 1777, and in that primitive time it was very difficult for a married man to do the full work of an itinerant preacher, moving from place to place at the pleasure of the appointing power. In consequence of this, many of the early Methodist preachers, when they married, either left the itinerancy or entered the ministry of some other denomination.

Mr. Asbury, under date of June 8, 1780, says: "Edward Dromgoole is a good preacher, but entangled with a family. We spoke of a plan for building houses in every circuit for preachers' wives, and the society to supply their families with bread and meat, so the preachers should travel from place to place as when single; for unless something of the kind be done we shall have no preachers but young ones in a few years. They will marry and stop."[1] Nevertheless Dromgoole remained an influential preacher, and appears from time to time in the Conferences, and for a number of years as an "assistant." One who heard him preach in North Carolina when he was past middle age remarks that "his voice, his countenance, and his gestures all gave a power to his eloquence, which is rarely equaled even at this day. The copious flow of tears and the awful peals of his voice showed that the preacher's whole soul was thrown into the subject, and it produced the most thrilling effect that I had ever witnessed. There was not a

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I., p. 290.

dry eye among the hundreds who listened to him on that occasion."[1] Even when he had become an octogenarian he retained his power as a preacher, and there is a record of his preaching as late as 1831 at a camp-meeting in Virginia, and one who heard him on that occasion says: "Take him all in all, I shall never see his like again."[2]

This was the man who came to the aid of Asbury and his fellow-commissioners at the Virginia Conference of 1780. It will be remembered on May 3, 1779, just after his Conference at Judge White's, that Asbury wrote to Edward Dromgoole, urging him, "if possible, to prevent a separation among the preachers in the South." On Sunday, July 2, 1780, after the Conference at Manakintown, he writes: "Edward Dromgoole is hearty in good old Methodism; we have had great union; I hope he will check the spirit of some of the divisive men."[3] This man, who had spent his ministerial life in the South, doubtless had much to do in bringing about a reunion between the two Conferences. He took his stand with Asbury, and made their cause his.

Asbury tells the story. He says that on Tuesday, May 9, 1780,—

"The Conference was called. Brothers Watters, Garrettson, and myself stood back; and being afterward joined by Brother Dromgoole, we were desired to come in, and I was permitted to speak. I read Wesley's thoughts against a separation, showed my private letters of instructions from Mr. Wesley,

[1] Bennett's Methodism in Virginia.
[2] The Methodist Protestant, September 2, 1831.
[3] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 294.

set before them the sentiments of the Delaware and Baltimore Conferences,[1] read our epistles, and read my letter to Brother Gatch, and Dickins's letter in answer. After some time spent in this way, it was proposed to me, if I would get the circuits supplied, they would desist; but that I could not do.

"We went to preaching; I spoke on Ruth ii, 4,[2] and spoke as though nothing had been the matter among the preachers or people; and we were greatly pleased and comforted; there was some moving among the people.

"In the afternoon we met. The preachers appeared to me to be farther off. There had been, I thought, some talking out of doors. When we—Asbury, Garrettson, Watters, and Dromgoole—could not come to a conclusion with them, we withdrew, and left them to deliberate on the conditions I offered, which was to suspend the measures they had taken for one year. After an hour's conference, we were called to receive their answer, which was that they could not submit to the terms of union. I then prepared to leave the house to go to a near neighbor's to lodge under the heaviest cloud I ever felt in America. O what I felt! Nor I alone, but the agents on both sides! They wept like children, but kept their opinions."

In his journal for the next day he says:

"I returned to take leave of Conference and to go off immediately to the North; but found they were brought to an agreement while I had been praying, as with a broken heart, in the house we went to lodge at, —— and Brothers Watters and Garrettson had been praying up-stairs, where the Conference sat. We heard what they had to say. Surely the hand of God has been greatly seen in all this. There might have been twenty promising preachers and three thousand people[3] seriously affected by this separation; but the Lord would not suffer this. We then had preaching by Brother Watters on 'Come thou with us, and we will do thee good.' Afterward we had a love-

[1] The Conferences of the Northern preachers in 1779 and 1780.

[2] "And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee."

[3] These estimates are conjectural and inaccurate.

feast; preachers and people wept, prayed, and talked, so that the spirit of dissension was powerfully weakened, and I hoped it would never take place again."[1]

Now we see more distinctly Asbury's meaning in using the word separation as applied to the Virginia Conference. He read Mr. Wesley's "Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England;"[2] but this was written in 1758, twenty-two years before, in view of conditions then existing in England, and about eight years prior to the introduction of Wesleyan Methodism into America. The conditions in America, as Mr. Wesley afterward admitted, were very different. Asbury considered that the ordinary Methodist preacher who administered the ordinances had separated, and that the people who received the sacraments from them likewise separated from the English State Church, to which they had been recommended to go for baptism and the Lord's Supper. That was Asbury's point of view; but the fact remains that Asbury and his followers separated from the regular Conference before it decided to depart from the usual custom, and without meeting in its session, and therein endeavoring to prevent the action which they deplored. When we consider these facts and also the pressing demand for the sacraments, we are surprised that the Southern ministers were as gentle and yielded so quickly, even for the purpose of promoting fraternal union with those to the North. It speaks well for their conciliatory spirit, when it is remembered that

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, p. 283.
[2] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., 1858, pp. 293-298.

they in fact yielded almost everything, while the Northern men practically yielded nothing. The Southern ministers agreed to suspend the ordinances for one year; the Northern preachers had none to suspend. They also agreed to meet in Baltimore the next year, but the Northern preachers did not propose to go South and meet with their brethren of that section. The unyielding were in the North; those who made the concessions were of the South.

Before leaving this momentous matter, we must cite the testimony of the Rev. William Watters, one of the three commissioners from the North. It was he who went uninvited to the Conference of 1779, at Judge White's, to urge Asbury to be present at the Fluvanna Conference, and it was he who was charged with a message from Asbury and his adherents to the regular Conference in Virginia. He was, therefore, a *persona grata*[1] with both parties, and gives us the best account of his mission and its results. He says that Philip Gatch and Reuben Ellis,

"Both thought their Baltimore brethren were hard with them, and there was little appearance of anything but an entire separation. They complained that I was the only one who did not join them, that treated them with affection and tenderness. I awfully feared our visit would be of little consequence, yet I willingly went down in the name of God, hoping against hope. We found our brethren as loving and as full of zeal as ever, and as determined on persevering in their newly adopted mode; for to all their former arguments they now added (what with many was infinitely stronger than all other arguments in the world) that the Lord approbated

[1] An agreeable or acceptable person, one in favor.

and greatly blessed his own ordinances, by them administered the past year. We had a great deal of loving conversation, with many tears; but I saw no bitterness, no shyness, no judging each other. We wept and prayed and sobbed, but neither would agree to the other's terms. In the meantime, I was requested to preach at twelve o'clock. As I had many preachers and professors to hear me, I spoke from the words of Moses to his father-in-law: 'We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it to you; come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.' After waiting two days, and all hopes of an accommodation failing, we had fixed on starting back early in the morning; but late in the evening it was proposed by one of their own party in Conference (none of the others being present) that there should be a suspension of the ordinances for the present year, and that our circumstances should be laid before Mr. Wesley, and his advice solicited; also that Mr. Asbury should be requested to ride through the different circuits, and superintend the work at large. The proposal in a few minutes took with all but a few. In the morning, instead of coming off in despair, we were invited to take our seats again in the Conference, where, with great rejoicings and praises to God, we, on both sides, heartily agreed to the accommodation. I could not but say, It is of the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. I knew of nothing upon earth that could have given me more real consolation; and I could not but be heartily thankful for the stand I had taken, and the part I had acted through the whole contest. I had, by several leading characters on both sides, been suspected of leaning to the opposite; could all have agreed to the administration of the ordinances, I should have had no objection; but until that was the case, I could not think ourselves ripe for so great a change. We have had every reason to believe that everything would end well; that the evils which had actually attended our partial division would make us more cautious how we should entertain one thought of taking a step that might have the least tendency to so great an evil."[1]

[1] Life of Rev. William Watters, p. 78.

Wonderful, indeed, is it that the strong men of this Conference, notwithstanding their conviction that their course had been right, should give up the very point for which they had battled. More wonderful was it that they consented to go to a Conference seat in the territory occupied by the Northern preachers; and most wonderful was it that they would request Mr. Asbury "to superintend the work at large," for this was practically accepting and extending his authority in the South. Surely it would be unfair to infer that those who made so many concessions for the sake of union were bitter or troublesome spirits.

Freeborn Garrettson, who knew them well, and who was opposed to their course, says:

"I do not think that Drew, in his Life of Coke, has, in several particulars, done justice to our American brethren. He represents them as very refractory, and supposes that Asbury had much trouble with them; whereas, the fact is, they went forth in the power of the Spirit, disseminating divine truth, and suffering much persecution and many privations, while Asbury had a quiet retreat at Judge White's, and that during the hottest time of our conflict.[1] It is true, our Southern brethren, to satisfy the people and their own consciences, did administer the ordinances in what they thought an extreme case. The leading members of the Fluvanna Conference were Dickins, Gatch, Yeargan, Poythress, Ellis, Tatum, etc., all faithful, pious, zealous men of God, who would have done credit to any religious connection. I admired their goodness in cordially agreeing to consult Wesley, and to follow his judgment, and, till they should receive his advice, to suspend the administration of the ordinances. If I am prolix on this subject, it is to show that our Virginia brethren were undeservedly accused of schism."[2]

[1] The War of the Revolution.

[2] F. Garrettson's Semi-centennial Sermon.

Mr. Garrettson gives a just statement as to the spirit of the Southern preachers, but possibly misinterprets Mr. Drew, who really appears to side with the Southern party and to put considerable blame upon Mr. Asbury. Thus he remarks, that when a request for the sacraments was made, Asbury "absolutely refused to give either preachers or people any redress." Then he observes that the Southern preachers "went forth in the name of God, and administered the sacraments to all whom they judged proper to receive them. The clamor of the people immediately subsided. All were satisfied with the enjoyment of their returning privileges, and prosperity became the companion of peace. Mr. Asbury, in the meanwhile, who had not yet shaken off the rusty fetters of 'apostolical succession,' found himself comparatively deserted by those whose respect for him still remained undiminished. Against the illegality of their proceedings he bore a public testimony, denying the authority by which the preachers acted, and declaring the ordination to which they had given existence invalid. With individuals his arguments had weight, and many hesitated to follow the measures they had adopted. In this manner he proceeded until he had proselyted some, had silenced others, and had shaken the faith of all; so that at a subsequent Conference he found means to procure a vote which declared the former ordination unscriptural. The breach was soon healed; a general reconciliation took place, and Mr. Asbury once more resumed the full exercise of

that authority of which he had, for a season, been partially deprived."[1]

Mr. Drew, on account of his intimacy with Dr. Coke, is good authority as to Coke in America and elsewhere; but, residing, as he did, in England, he is not the best authority as to events in America some years before Coke came to this country. There is no evidence, for example, to prove that the Virginia Conference ever declared by vote, or in any other way, that their ordination was unscriptural.

Whatever means were used, whether public or private, it was now evident that Asbury had triumphed, and Lee says: "By his being often with the preachers and among the people in the South the divisive spirit died away, and the preachers and people by degrees became more reconciled to the old plan and to the old preachers, and peace and harmony were once more established throughout the connection."[2]

It is a little singular that the printed Minutes of 1780 give none of the transactions of that, which certainly was the eighth regular Conference at which these important matters were decided. All that appears are two questions, as to where the Southern preachers are stationed and what numbers there were in the societies, and these are added as questions twenty-seven and twenty-eight to the Minutes of As-

[1] Samuel Drew, Life of Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D., Amer. Ed., 1847, pp. 69, 70.

[2] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 74.

bury's Conference, which had been held at Baltimore. Some might allege that it was because the victorious party controlled the press, but probably it was because at the period when the Minutes were put in print both sides had so blended into one that all were willing to let the matter sink into oblivion.

It had been agreed that a letter would be addressed to Mr. Wesley. Mr. Garrettson tells us that "a circumstantial letter was written to that venerable apostle of the age,"[1] and in his Semi-centennial Sermon he states that the communication was drawn up by John Dickins. On Friday, the 12th of May, 1780, Mr. Asbury notes that he takes a "rest this day to write to Mr. Wesley."[2] Doubtless in this letter he recounted the occurrences to which we have referred, and requested his advice and aid; but on Saturday, the 16th of September, he specifically mentions writing on that subject. He says: "Wrote to Mr. Wesley at the desire of the Virginia Conference, who had consented to suspend the administration of the ordinances for one year."[3] At the same time he was exerting his influence upon the preachers to consummate the reunion. On the 24th of October, 1780, he says: "I wrote to the preachers jointly and severally about a union."[4] November the 11th he makes this curious entry: "William Glendenning has handed me a book written by Jeremiah Burroughs, in the time of the Commonwealth, upon heart-divisions and the evil of

[1] F. Garrettson's Autobiography, p. 162.
[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 284. [3] *Id.*, p. 309. [4] *Id.*, p. 314.

the times. In this work I promise myself good arguments against our separating brethren."[1] So he was preparing for further conflict.

The heading of the printed Minutes for 1781 states the Conference was "held at Choptank, State of Delaware, April 16, 1781, and adjourned to Baltimore the 24th of said month."

Lee says: "On the 24th day of April the ninth Conference met in Baltimore. But previous to this a few preachers on the Eastern Shore held a *little Conference* in Delaware State, near Choptank, to make some arrangements for those preachers who could not go with them, and then adjourned (as they called it) to Baltimore; so, upon the whole, it was considered but one Conference."[2] Asbury mentions the "little Conference" under date of April 13th, though the entry evidently covers two or more days. He says: "After meeting we rode about twenty miles to Brother White's, where about twenty preachers met together to hold a Conference."[3] But he does not say what particular business called them together or what they did at this gathering. At the Baltimore session, however, there seemed a necessity for presenting some explanation, and the printed Minutes show the following questions and answers:

"*Ques.* 2. Why was Conference begun at Choptank?

"*Ans.* To examine those who could not go to Baltimore, and to provide supplies for the circuits where the Lord is more immediately pouring out his Spirit.

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 318.
[2] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 75.
[3] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 328.

"*Ques.* 3. Is there any precedent for this in the economy of Methodism?

"*Ans.* Yes. Mr. Wesley generally holds a Conference in Ireland for the same purposes."

The names in the printed Minutes would lead us to infer that the most of those who met near Choptank also attended at Baltimore, and it is not improbable that Asbury availed himself of the occasion to make it a sort of a "preparatory Conference," somewhat like the meeting held in Delaware in 1779, and possibly plans were mapped out for the work at Baltimore. To say that it adjourned to meet in Baltimore is rather awkward. This was not a regular Conference, and the Conference at Baltimore was not an adjourned meeting of the Conference held at Choptank, but was the regularly appointed Conference for the year, in which the Northern and Southern preachers were to meet together, as one called it, in "General Conference;" that is to say, the preachers generally were to meet together in one Conference, and not, as they had been doing for two years, in two distinct Conferences.

The Conference held in Baltimore on the 24th of April, 1781, was the ninth regular Conference. All that Asbury gives in his journal about the session is the following: "Our Conference began in Baltimore, where several of the preachers attended from Virginia and North Carolina. All but one agreed to return to the old plan, and give up the administration of the ordinances. Our troubles now seem over from that quarter, and there appears to be a considerable

change in the preachers from North to South. All was conducted in peace and love."[1]

Jesse Lee, who became a traveling preacher the next year, remarks that "at this Conference most part, if not all, the traveling preachers who were present, resolved, and to give the greater sanction, they subscribed their names to the resolution, to discountenance a separation among either preachers or people. They also agreed that they would preach the old Methodist doctrine and enforce the discipline which was contained in the Notes,[2] Sermons, and Minutes published by Mr. Wesley."[3]

This appears to have been about the first thing presented and settled; for the first item in the printed Minutes is:

"*Ques.* 1. What preachers are now determined, after mature consideration, close observation, and earnest prayer, to preach the old Methodist doctrine, and strictly enforce the discipline as contained in the Notes, Sermons, and Minutes published by Mr. Wesley so far as they respect both preachers and people, according to the knowledge we have of them, and the ability God shall give, and firmly resolved to discountenance a separation among either preachers or people?" and the answer is in the form of thirty-nine names, evidently those of the preachers present who signed the agreement. Among these we find the names of Reuben Ellis and Lee Roy Cole,[4] who

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol I, p. 328.
[2] Wesley's Notes on the New Testament.
[3] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 75.
[4] Or Leroy Cole.

were in the governing committee and presbytery created by the Virginia Conference of 1779. We find also the names of Francis Poythress, Nelson Reed, and Henry Willis, who, in that Conference, advocated the right of the Methodist preachers to administer the sacraments;[1] but we miss those of other prominent Southern members.

Under question 19, "Who desist from traveling this year?" we find the names of John Dickins, Isham Tatum, William Moore, Greenberry Green, and Daniel Ruff, all of whom, excepting the last named, were identified with the Southern section. The name of James O' Kelly does not appear among the signers or among those taking appointments, but it reappears in the following year. The probability is that a number of the Southern men considered the question settled and remained on their circuits; but no other Conference was held this year. John Dickins probably retired for the time being on account of ill-health; for, as already noted, his voice was failing.

There was now only one Conference, and American Methodism was once more united. If the union had not taken place, there might have grown up from that day in the United States two Methodisms, not only with differences in polity, but also with sectional distinctions. Yet the union was brought about by sacrificing the principle of self-government, as asserted by the Virginia Conference, and putting

[1] Philip Gatch's MS. Journal; Leroy M. Lee, D. D., Life of Jesse Lee, 1860, p. 79.

themselves under the government of one man—Asbury. In other words, it was a reversion to personal government. The compensation was in the unity it gave as a basis for another departure which would speedily come.

The Conference took action in regard to a number of practical matters, as the following questions and answers will show:

"*Ques.* 4. Should we take the preachers into full connection after one year's trial? Or, would it not be better, after considering how young they are in age, grace, and gifts, to try them two years; unless it be one of double testimony, of whom there is a general approbation?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 5. Shall any assistant take a local preacher to travel in the circuit, in the vacancy of Conference, without consulting Brother Asbury, or the assistants near him, by word or letter?

"*Ans.* No.

"*Ques.* 6. If any former assistant has had just cause for removing preaching from any house, should his successor return to it, without consulting Brother Asbury or the assistants in the circuits near him; and, if it remains doubtful, leave it till next Conference?

"*Ans.* Agreed.

"*Ques.* 7. Ought not the preachers to examine every person admitted upon trial for three months—first, whether they have been turned out; and if so, let them not be received, without they have evidenced repentance and can be generally recommended?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 8. Ought not the preachers often to read the 'Rules of the Societies,' the 'Character of a Methodist,' and the 'Plain Account of Christian Perfection,' if they have got them?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 14. Ought not every assistant to give a circum-

stantial account of the circuit in writing, both of societies and local preachers, with a plan, to his successor?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 15. Ought not each assistant to inform all our societies in his circuit of the sum that is to be made up for the preachers' quarterage, exclusive of travelling expenses, and urge them to give according to their several abilities?

"*Ans.* Yes.

"*Ques.* 17. What proper method should be taken, supposing any difference should arise in dealing between our brethren?

"*Ans.* Let the assistant preacher at quarterly meeting consult with the stewards in appointing proper persons to examine into the circumstances; and if there be any suspicion of injustice or inability in the referees, to appoint men of more skill and probity, and the parties to abide by their decision, or be excluded from the society."[1]

The printed Minutes make no mention of the reception of any letter from Mr. Wesley in response to that which had been sent him the previous year, in regard to their sacramental deprivations and difficulties; but the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson is authority for the assertion that his reply had been received and was made known this year. Speaking of his mission to the Virginia Conference, he says: "The proposition that we made to them was, that they should suspend the administration of the ordinances for one year; in the meanwhile we would consult Mr. Wesley, and in the following May we would have a Union Conference in Baltimore and abide by his judgment. To this proposal they unanimously agreed; and a letter, containing a circumstantial account of the case, drawn up by Mr. Dickins, was

[1] Printed Minutes, 1773-1813, pp. 28-32.

sent to Mr. Wesley. In May, 1781, we met, and received Mr. Wesley's answer, which was that we should continue on the old plan until further direction. We unanimously agreed to follow his counsel, and went on harmoniously."[1]

Mr. Garrettson's memory was probably a little at fault as to the time of the meeting of the Conference in Baltimore. The fact is that it met in the latter part of April; but as the regular sessions of Conferences in Baltimore were invariably held in the month of May in the early years, the mistake is easily explained. It must seem singular that Mr. Garrettson is the only one of the men of that time who mentions the reception of a letter from Mr. Wesley in 1781; and yet, if the war did not interfere, nothing is more probable than that such a reply came from the founder of Methodism. The agreement had been to "suspend the ordinances" for one year, and to submit the case to Mr. Wesley, which implied the expectation that a letter would be sent and a reply could be received within a year. That the sacraments were generally suspended for several years, leads to the inference either that a letter so advising had been received from Wesley, or that the Southern preachers for other reasons had abandoned the position which, because of the neglected condition of the people, they had conscientiously taken. It seems more probable that word had come from Wesley.

The work in the South had been greatly interfered with by the moving armies and the animosities

[1] Garrettson's Semi-centennial Sermon.

existing between the patriots and the Tories, and yet the reports at this Conference showed a gain of 22 preachers and 2,035 members;[1] but the War of Independence was drawing to a close. The capitulation of General Cornwallis to Washington at Yorktown, on the 19th of October, 1781, was the beginning of the end; and the British House of Commons, on the 4th of March, 1782, resolved that those who would advise the king to continue the war on the continent of North America should be declared enemies of the sovereign and of the country. The struggle was now about over, though the hostile armies remained in the field.

The Conference of 1781 closed another period in the history of the American Conferences. The variation from Wesley's instructions and the departure from the original agreement had been abandoned by the Southern section. Now there was really only one Conference; and Asbury, who had once been appointed by Mr. Wesley, is now recognized throughout the land as Wesley's general assistant for America; so that once more the American preachers united in one Conference are in submission to Mr. Wesley, or to that which they understand to be his views.

[1] Minutes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONFERENCE IN AMERICA FROM 1782 TO 1784.

WITH a united Conference, and with a unit of government in Mr. Asbury, American Methodism entered upon a new but brief period in its early career.

Everything seemed serene upon the surface, but Mr. Asbury's journal gives us glimpses of lingering dissatisfaction and difficulty.

In the month of October, 1781, Asbury was in Pennsylvania. On the 12th he came to Philadelphia, where he remained about a week. During this visit he notes that "the society here appears to be in a better state than they have been in since the British army was here. . . . There is a deepening of the work in some souls, but I fear the religion of others evaporates in talk. . . . Among too many of the citizens the spirit of politics has, in whole or in part, eaten out the spirit of religion."[1]

At this time he states: "We have come to a conclusion to print the four volumes of 'Mr. Wesley's Sermons,'" which were recognized as a depository of Wesleyan doctrine. A few days later, he writes: "My intervals of time are employed in marking 'Baxter's Cure for Church Divisions' for abridg-

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, pp. 335, 336.

ment, which may some day see the light." Possibly he wished he had it then for distribution, for he adds: "My soul is drawn out to God to know whether I ought to go to Virginia this winter, in order, if possible, to prevent the spreading of the fire of division."[1]

On the 3d of the following month Asbury attended a quarterly meeting in Delaware, and he observes: "We scrutinized and dealt with fidelity one with another. Nothing would satisfy the preachers but my consenting to go to Virginia,"[2] and there must have been some reason for their anxiety, and that reason was the reported discontent in the South.

On the 6th of December he reached Baltimore. He says: "Here I received letters from Virginia, by which I learn that affairs are not so bad in Virginia as I feared. A few of the local preachers have made some stir, and the traveling preachers have withdrawn from them and their adherents. I have spent some time in Baltimore with satisfaction, and could freely stay longer; but there may be danger in these trading towns, and my way South seems to be open."[3] On the 19th of December he was in Leesburg, Virginia. He writes: "From thence I traveled and preached through Hanover and Gloucester Circuits. I find the spirit of party among some of the people. The local preachers tell them of the ordinances, and they catch at them like fish at a bait; but when they are informed that they will have to give up the

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 336. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Id.*, p. 337.

traveling preachers, I apprehend they will not be so fond of their new plan; and, if I judge right, the last struggle of a yielding party will be made at the approaching Conference, to be held at the Manakintown."[1] The Conference at Manakintown, to which he alludes, was evidently a Quarterly Conference.

In the month of January, 1782, he mentions that "there is considerable distress amongst our societies, caused by some of the local preachers, who are not satisfied unless they administer the ordinances without order or ordination; and the whole circuit appears to be more or less tinctured with their spirit." Again he says: "I find the party men among our societies grow weak, and I am persuaded this division will cause the sincere among preachers and people to cleave closer to doctrine and discipline, and may be the means of purging our societies of those who are corrupt in their principles."[2]

All this shows that, notwithstanding the action of the Conference, there was still considerable dissatisfaction among the people in the South because they were without the sacraments. It is probable, also, that prominent preachers sympathized with this feeling.

In the month of March, 1782, Asbury traveled through North Carolina. While here he met Philip Bruce, who had charge of the New Hope Circuit; and he also met James O'Kelly, who at this time appears to have been without a regular appointment. It is probable that Mr. O'Kelly was not quite

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 337. [2] *Id.*, p. 338.

satisfied with the concession that had been made by the Virginia Conference, and that Mr. Bruce was not quite sure the right thing had been done; for Asbury, on the 18th of March, writes: "I obtained the promise of Brothers P. Bruce and O'Kelly to join heartily in our connection;"[1] and so it is likely that Asbury brought his influence to bear upon other persons who were somewhat disaffected. Then he journeyed northward for the Conference which was to be held in Virginia. On the 13th of April he held a quarterly meeting at White Oak Chapel, where he preached on: "The children thou shalt have after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me; give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children and am desolate?" etc.[2] In this we may perceive some reference to probable losses in the past, and an encouragement to hope for gains in the future. Thus Asbury has frequent direct or indirect allusions to the difficulties which had existed in American Methodism, and possibly then existed over the sacramental question.

On Sunday, April 14th, he makes this entry: "I preached at the chapel, and then went to Church. I read the lessons for Mr. Jarratt, who preached a great sermon on 'Union and Love,' from the 123d Psalm. We received the sacrament, and afterward went home with Mr. Jarratt, that we might accompany him to

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 343.
[2] Isaiah xlix, 20, prob. to 23; Asbury's Journal, Vol. I, p. 344.

our Conference."[1] The gentleman to whom Asbury refers had been a clergyman of the Church of England, and was one of a very small number left in the country after the War of Independence began; and it will be seen that Mr. Asbury illustrated his teachings, for he preached in the Methodist Chapel and then went to "Church" for the sacraments from an Episcopally ordained clergyman. It is interesting to note that the Methodist preacher read the lessons for the Episcopal clergyman.

The Rev. Devereux Jarratt, to whom allusion has just been made, was born in New Kent County, Virginia, in 1732 or 1733. Determining to enter the ministry, he went to England for that purpose in 1762. On his return he became rector of the parish at Bath. He was an evangelical clergyman, and because of his friendliness towards the early Methodists, and especially because of his relation to questions in dispute, deserves special mention.

In 1773 he wrote to Mr. Wesley, thanking him for sending preachers to America, two of whom—Pilmoor and Boardman—were then laboring in Virginia, but asks: "What can two or three preachers do in such an extended country as this? Can not you do something more for us? Can not you send us a minister of the Church of England, to be stationed in the vacant parish? I wish you could see how matters are among us. This would serve instead of a thousand arguments to induce you to exert yourself in this affair." At that period he says there were

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 344.

ninety-five parishes in the Colony, and all, excepting one, were supplied with clergymen; but that ninety-three out of the ninety-four ministers appeared to be without "the power and spirit of vital religion."[1]

In a narrative which he wrote for Mr. Wesley, Mr. Jarratt says: "August 29, 1763, I was chosen rector of B. in the county of D. in Virginia. Ignorance of the things of God, profaneness, and irreligion then prevailed among all ranks and degrees; so that I doubt if even the form of godliness was to be found in any one family of this large and populous parish. I was a stranger to the people; my doctrines were quite new to them, and were neither preached nor believed by any other clergyman, so far as I could learn, throughout the province."[2]

This picture of ministers and people is from an impartial hand, and gives us a fair conception of clergy and laity in Virginia shortly before the Revolutionary War; and it is not a matter to be wondered at that pious people objected to taking the sacraments from clergymen of such a character.

Mr. Jarratt tells in this narrative that, in 1765, a few were religiously impressed, and that then he "began to preach abroad, as well as in private houses, and to meet little companies in the evenings, and converse freely on divine things." Further, he says:

"In the years 1770 and 1771 we had a more considerable outpouring of the Spirit, at a place in my parish called White Oak. It was here first I formed the people into a society, that

[1] Methodist Magazine, 1786, p. 567.
[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, p. 158.

they might assist and strengthen each other. . . . In the year 1772 the revival was more considerable, and extended itself in some places for fifty or sixty miles round. It increased still more in the following year, and several sinners were truly converted to God. In spring, 1774, it was more remarkable than ever. . . . I formed several societies out of those which were convinced or converted. . . . In the counties of Sussex and Brunswick, the work for the year 1773 was chiefly carried on by the labors of the people called Methodists. The first of them who appeared in these parts was Mr. R. W. [Robert Williams], who, you know, was a plain, artless, indefatigable preacher of the gospel. . . . The next year others of his brethren came, who gathered many societies, both in this neighborhood and in other places, as far as North Carolina. They now began to ride the circuit, and to take care of the societies already formed, which was rendered a happy means both of deepening and spreading the work of God."[1]

The Rev. Mr. Jarratt was the one clergyman who showed such a friendly interest in the early American Methodists. If there had been many more like him, it is not probable that the Virginia Conference would have asserted its right, in 1779, to ordain its preachers, and give the Methodist people the sacraments at the hands of their own pastors, under whose ministry they had been converted; and yet, even if there had been many such clergymen, there is little doubt that at a later period the Methodists would have demanded their own sacraments, just as English preachers urged their right and finally secured it, though in a land where State clergymen were abundant. At this time, however, owing to the flight of

[1] Printed in Asbury's Journal, 1821, pp. 158, 159; Methodist Quarterly Review, 1855, pp. 502, 503.

nearly all the English clergy on account of the Revolution, the Virginia preachers believed the demand for present action was imperative.

The heading of the printed Minutes for 1782 states that the Conference was "held at Ellis's Preaching-house, in Sussex County, Virginia, April 17, 1782, and adjourned to Baltimore, May 21st." This was the tenth regular Annual Conference, and from this time there were never less than two sessions held each year. For the purpose of making regulations or expressing opinions for the whole body of American Methodists, both bodies were one; or rather, the one body met in two sections as a matter of convenience.

Lee observes that "the work had so increased and spread that it was now found necessary to have a Conference in the South every year, continuing the Conference in the North as usual. Yet, as the Conference in the North was of the longest standing, and withal composed of the oldest preachers, it was allowed greater privileges than that in the South, especially in making rules and forming regulations for the societies. Accordingly, when anything was agreed to in the Virginia Conference, and afterwards disapproved of in the Baltimore Conference, it was dropped. But if any rule was fixed and determined on at the Baltimore Conference, the preachers in the South were under the necessity of abiding by it. The Southern Conference was considered at that time as a convenience, and designed to accommodate the preachers in that part of the work, and to do all the

business of a regular Conference, except that of making or altering particular rules."[1]

Dr. Leroy M. Lee says: "This division of a still united body—for there was really but one Conference after all—seems to have been designed more for the convenience of the preachers in the Southern and more distant portions of the work than for any other object. A preacher in one division possessed the right to sit and vote in the other. And as the rules and regulations then forming the subjects of legislation were of a prudential and temporary nature, there was not, that we are aware of, any ground of complaint or any cause of dissatisfaction at the possession or exercise of the veto power in the Northern branch of the body."[2] The same author suggests that "it was, perhaps, owing to this arrangement, that the Conference in the South was held first, and closed its proceedings by adjourning to meet at the time and place to be held in the North."

Asbury's Baltimore Conference, originally representing a protesting body and a section, had become the chief Conference, and the Virginia Conference, which in 1779 represented a majority of the preachers and the people, had sunk to a secondary and subordinate place. The regular Conference, which met in Virginia in 1779 and 1780, had indeed merged itself into the Baltimore Conference, and the new Virginia Conference had become a sort of "preparatory Conference," and hereafter, for a number of

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, pp. 78, 79.
[2] Leroy M. Lee, Life of Rev. Jesse Lee, Nashville, 1860, p. 101.

years, will we read of the Conference at "Ellis's and at Baltimore."

We do not know precisely what was done at the Conference held at the former place on the 17th of April, but Asbury has recorded some of the particulars. He says:

"Tuesday (16th) we set out, and on the next day (17th) reached Ellis's, at whose house we held the Conference. The people flocked together for preaching. Mr. Jarratt gave us a profitable discourse on the 14th chapter of Hosea.[1]

"In the evening the preachers met in Conference. As there had been much distress felt by those of them of Virginia relative to the administration of the ordinances, I proposed to such as were so disposed, to enter into a written agreement to cleave to the old plan, in which we had been so greatly blessed, that we might have the greater confidence in each other, and know on whom to depend. This instrument was signed by the greater part of the preachers without hesitation. Next morning I preached on Phil. ii, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. I had liberty, and it pleased God to set it home. One of the preachers, James Haw, who had his difficulties, was delivered from them all, and, with the exception of one, all the signatures of the preachers present were obtained. We received seven into connection, and four remained on trial. At noon, Mr. Jarratt spoke on the union of the attributes. Friday, 19th, we amicably settled our business and closed our Conference. Mr. Jarratt preached on 'A man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest,' etc. We had a love-feast—the power of God was manifested in a most extraordinary manner—preachers and people wept, believed, loved, and obeyed."[2]

---

[1] "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon."

[2] Asbury's Journal, New York, 1821, pp. 344, 345.

A peculiar emphasis seems to be placed on the last word, "obeyed." Loyalty to authority was part of the training of a Methodist minister. It is evident that there was a restlessness on the part of the preachers and people, which gave Asbury great anxiety. There was ground for this restiveness, for the Virginia Conference of 1780 had made a great concession in suspending the administration of the sacraments for one year. Now two years had passed, and yet no relief had come. Still Asbury persevered in his attempt to hold them in allegiance to Wesley and the Large Minutes, and so privately exerted his influence, and now in the Conference asks the preachers to sign a formal instrument, so that he might "know on whom to depend."

It would appear that some, possibly without a formal renunciation of the authority of the Conference, persisted in administering the sacraments. Probably they waited until the year agreed upon for the suspension had ended, and then resumed, believing that, as they had kept their part of the contract, they were now at liberty to proceed as before.

The Sunday after this Conference, Mr. Asbury writes: "I am persuaded the separation of some from our original plan about the ordinances will, upon the whole, have a tendency to unite the body together, and to make the preachers and people abide wherein they are called."[1]

Two weeks later he writes: "I find many of the

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 345.

people, and some of the local preachers, quite warm about the ordinances, on which subject there is much disputation."[1]

Asbury is now on his way to the Conference at Baltimore. On the 11th of May he preached at Culpeper Court House, Virginia, where he says: "Here I heard the good news that Britain had acknowledged the independence for which America has been contending—may it be so! The Lord does what to him seemeth good."[2] This news was a little premature, for the preliminary articles of peace were not signed until the 30th of November, 1782, and the definitive treaty of peace between England and the United States was not signed until the 3d of September of the following year; but Sir Guy Carleton arrived at New York early in May, 1782, with instructions to promote the wishes of Great Britain for an accommodation with the United States. Still the remark is useful as showing the sympathy of Asbury for the cause of the young Republic. In a few days we find him holding a quarterly meeting on Fairfax Circuit, and on the 18th he writes: "I set out with Brother G. [Does he mean Gatch or Glendenning?], who has given up his separating plan. The Lord has conquered him, and I hope that all who are worthy will return."[3] Asbury's journal gives a very brief account of the Conference held in Baltimore in May, 1782. In it Asbury says:

"Monday, 21st. A few of us began Conference in Baltimore. Next day we had a full meeting. The preachers all

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 345. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Id.*, p. 346.

signed the agreement proposed at the Virginia Conference, and there was a unanimous resolve to adhere to the old Methodist plan. We spent most of the day in examining the preachers. We had regular daily preaching. Monday Brother Ellis preached; on Tuesday I spoke on 1 Tim. iv, 12.

"Wednesday, 23d. We had many things before us. Our printing plan was suspended for the present for want of funds.

"Friday 25th. Was set apart for fasting and prayer. We had a love-feast. The Lord was present and all was well. The preachers, in general were satisfied. I found myself burthened with labors and cares. We have now fifty-nine traveling preachers, and eleven thousand and seven hundred and eighty-five in society. Our young men are serious and their gifts enlarged."[1]

His principal purpose appears to have been to prevent the administration of the sacraments by the Methodist preachers, and to keep them in the same relation to Wesley and the Large Minutes as they were at the first Conference held in 1773. Hence the request for signatures to the new agreement. Thus from time to time he drives in the bolts, and then rivets them so that they are more and more firmly bound.

The Minutes show a number of changes in the form, order, and substance of the questions asked. The standing questions are brought first, and the temporary and miscellaneous questions follow. The regular questions were: "1. What preachers are admitted into connection?"[2] "2. What preachers remain on trial?" "3. What preachers are admitted on trial?" "4. Who act as assistants?" "5. Are there any objections to any of the preachers?" "6. How are the preachers stationed?" "7. How are the preachers

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 346.

[2] Jesse Lee says "full connection," History of Methodists, p. 79.

to change after six months?" "8. What numbers are there in society?" "9. What is the yearly collection?" The answer to this question was "42*l.* 16*s.* 3*d.*" "10. How was it expended?" "*Ans.* On the necessities of the preachers." Then followed queries of a less permanent nature, thus, "11. What shall be done to revive the work?" "*Ans.* Hold evening meetings and preach in the mornings in convenient places." The matter of equality of support was met in this way: "*Ques.* 12. What shall be done to get a regular and impartial supply for the maintenance of the preachers?" "*Ans.* Let everything they receive, either in money or clothing, be valued by the preachers and stewards at quarterly meeting, and an account of the deficiency given in to the Conference, that he may be supplied by the profits arising from the books and the Conference collections." "*Ques.* 13. How shall we more effectually guard against disorderly traveling preachers?" "*Ans.* Write at the bottom of every certificate: The authority this conveys is limited to next Conference.'" "*Ques.* 14. How must we do if a preacher will not desist after being found guilty?" "*Ans.* Let the nearest assistant stop him immediately. In Brother Asbury's absence, let the preachers inform the people of these rules." "*Ques.* 15. How shall we more effectually guard against disorderly local preachers?" "*Ans.* Write at the bottom of the certificate: This conveys authority no longer than you walk uprightly and submit to the direction of the assistant preacher." Thus prudential regulations were made so that the

license of a preacher was good only for one year, and if it was not then renewed the individual lost his rank.

The sixteenth question was another act of prospective excommunication. It read: "By what rule shall we conduct ourselves towards the preachers and people that separate from us?" According to the printed Minutes, the answer was, "Disown them." Separation, as used by Asbury, meant the administration of the sacraments by the Methodist preachers and receiving them at their hands by the people, which the question and answer prove was still done by some, possibly, as already suggested, on the ground that they had waited a year and yet no relief had come.

Dr. Leroy M. Lee had access to manuscript Minutes of the Conference held at "Ellis's Meeting-house" in 1782, 1783, and 1784, and he says that the answer given in the manuscript journal was not in the two words "disown them," but was, "Put the people out of society when they receive, and the preachers when they administer, the ordinances, if they have been previously warned."[1]

It is probable that extreme measures were not resorted to until the parties had been particularly warned; but there was an unmistakable determination to exclude all who did not yield to the rule as agreed upon.

For the first time a certificate of membership for the laity was ordered. Question 17 was: "How shall

[1] Leroy M. Lee, D. D., Life of Rev. Jesse Lee, Nashville, 1860, pp. 100-102.

we more effectually guard against impostors?" "*Ans.* Let no person remove from North to South without a certificate from the assistant preacher, and let no one be received into society without." Or, as Lee phrases it: "To guard against disorderly members, it was concluded that no member of our society should remove to another part of the country without a certificate from the assistant preacher, and if they did not carry with them such a certificate, they should not be received into society."[1]

The eighteenth question brings us once more to the sacramental question. It was as follows: "Shall we erase that question proposed in Deer Creek Conference respecting the ordinances?" "*Ans.* Undoubtedly we must. It can have no place in our Minutes while we stand to our agreement signed in Conference; it is therefore disannulled." The "Deer Creek Conference" was held "at a preaching-house near Deer Creek, in Harford County, Md., May 20, 1777." Turning to the printed Minutes for that year, we do not find any reference to the sacraments. It is manifest that something was expunged so that it did not appear when, in 1795, for the first time, the Minutes of 1777 were printed. Just how much was stricken out we can not tell; but, as already seen, Garrettson states that the question, "Shall the preachers in America administer the ordinances?" was asked; or, as Gatch has it in his manuscript journal, it was asked, "What shall be done with respect to the or-

[1] Jesse Lee, Hist. of Methodists, 1810, p. 80.

dinances?" and Garrettson says it was agreed to "suspend them until the next Conference." Gatch also states that the question of altering the "original plan" was considered, and the preachers agreed that the next Conference would show them more clearly.[1]

Mr. Garrettson says: "The question was asked, I think, by Mr. Rankin, 'Shall we administer the ordinances?' It was debated, but the decision was suspended till the next Conference."[2]

Under the action of the Conference of 1782 all this was erased from the Minutes of 1777, and possibly much more; and, though the reference is only to the Deer Creek Conference, it is probable that the principle was applied to the Minutes of the Fluvanna and other Conferences, so that every question and every decision which seemed to favor the idea of Methodist preachers administering the sacraments was expunged from the manuscript Minutes. This will account for the silence of the printed Minutes upon this question, excepting where they show adverse action. The legality of such a course may well be doubted; but it is an interesting item of history, and shows that Asbury and the Conference wanted to get rid of any reference to that which the Conference at this time disapproved. The order to erase, however, called attention to the fact that some transaction had taken place, and gave it a sort of immortality.

Right in connection with this order to expunge is

---

[1] See pp. 122, 123.

[2] Garrettson's Semi-centennial Sermon before the New York Conference.

the following in reference to the Rev. Devereux Jarratt:

"The Conference acknowledge their obligations to the Rev. Mr. Jarratt for his kind and friendly services to the preachers and people from our first entrance into Virginia, and more particularly for attending our Conference in Sussex, in public and private; and advise the preachers in the South to consult him and take his advice in the absence of Brother Asbury."

This is the first resolution of thanks adopted by an American Methodist Conference.

The nineteenth question was: "Do the brethren in Conference unanimously choose Brother Asbury to act according to Mr. Wesley's original appointment, and preside over the American Conferences and the whole work?" *Ans.* "Yes." So the preachers again selected Mr. Asbury to be their chief, or, in other words, again agreed to recognize him as Wesley's general assistant. This was the formal action of the reunited preachers. It was also agreed that "every assistant preacher must so order his circuit, that either himself or one of his helpers may travel with Mr. Asbury through his circuit." It was decided to have four general fasts on the first Thursdays in June, September, January, and April.

The twenty-second and last question was for the first time propounded, namely: "When and where shall our next Conferences be held?" and the answer was: "For Virginia the first Tuesday, and in Baltimore the last Wednesday in May."[1] Lee remarks: "This was the first time that this question was ever

[1] Printed Minutes, 1813, pp. 33-37.

found on the Minutes," and "it was now settled and fixed to have two Conferences in each year."[1]

In the interval between this and the next Conference Asbury traveled very extensively through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. On the 5th of April, 1783, he writes: "I heard the news that peace was confirmed between England and America. I had various exercises of mind on the occasion. It may cause great changes to take place amongst us, some for the better and some for the worse. It may make against the work of God. Our preachers will be far more likely to settle in the world; and our people, by getting into trade and acquiring wealth, may drink into its spirit. Believing the report to be true, I took some notice of it while I treated on Acts x, 36, at Brother Clayton's, near Halifax, where they were firing their cannons and rejoicing in their way on the occasion." Then he adds: "This day I prevailed with Brother Dickins to go to New York, where I expect him to be far more useful than in his present station."[2]

Asbury was very fearful as to the effect of peace and prosperity on the preachers and people, but Jesse Lee saw good results. He says:

"The Revolutionary War being now closed, and a general peace established, we could go into all parts of the country without fear; and we soon began to enlarge our borders, and to preach in many places where we had not been before. We soon saw the fruit of our labors in the new circuits, and in

[1] Jesse Lee, Hist. of Methodists, p. 79.
[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, p. 355.

various parts of the country, even in old places where we had preached in former years with but little success.

"One thing in particular that opened the way for the spreading of the gospel by our preachers was this: during the war, which had continued seven or eight years, many of the members of our societies had, through fear, necessity, or choice, moved into the back settlements and into new parts of the country; and as soon as the National peace was settled and the way was open, they solicited us to come among them; and by their earnest and frequent petitions, both verbal and written, we were prevailed on and encouraged to go among them; and they were ready to receive us with open hands and willing hearts, and to cry out, '*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*'

"The Lord prospered us much in the thinly-settled parts of the country, where, by collecting together the old members of our society and by joining some new ones with them, the work greatly revived, and the heavenly flame of religion spread far and wide."[1]

A new era for the Nation and for the Church had begun, and this new era was to bring greater prosperity to both. As the time for the Conferences of 1783 approached, Asbury turned his face northward and entered Virginia, and on the 18th of April held a quarterly meeting at White Oak Chapel, as he had the year before; and Mr. Jarratt preached, and administered the sacrament.[2]

On the 21st, he writes, he "set out for Buckingham, to visit some who have been separated from us on account of the ordinances, and my spirit was refreshed among them;"[3] so the difficulty had not entirely disappeared.

Then he says: "After long rides through Fluvanna and Orange Circuits, I came to Petersburg on

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, pp. 84, 85.
[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 356. [3] *Ibid.*

Monday, the 5th of May, and the next day to Ellis's Chapel. Wednesday, 7th, our Conference began at this place. Some young laborers were taken in to assist in spreading the gospel, which greatly prospers in the North. We all agreed in the spirit of African liberty, and strong testimonies were borne in its favor in our love-feast; our affairs were conducted in love."[1] That is all he tells us about the Conference at "Ellis's Preaching-house" in 1783.

Lee states that "in 1783 the eleventh Conference began at Ellis's Meeting-house, Sussex County, Virginia, on the 6th day of May, and adjourned to Baltimore to the 27th day of the same month."[2] Asbury notes that the Baltimore session began on the 26th. His entry is: "Tuesday, 26th. We began our Conference with what preachers were present. On Wednesday we had a full assembly, which lasted until Friday. We had a love-feast, and parted in peace."[3] The heading of the printed Minutes is in harmony with the statement of Lee. It reads: "Held at Ellis's Preaching-house, May 6, 1783, and adjourned to Baltimore, the 27th." The probability is that the adjourned session was appointed for the 27th, but that Asbury, finding a number of preachers in Baltimore on the 26th, began the session on that date. The next day there was a full attendance, because the preachers expected the Conference to convene at that time.

---

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 356.
[2] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 82.
[3] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 356.

The Rev. Jesse Lee was an interested spectator of the proceedings of the Conference of 1782, and after its adjournment became a traveling preacher. At the Conference of 1783 he was formally received on trial, so that many of his accounts of these early days have the accuracy of an eye-witness. In other particulars he gives the direct evidence of those who were participants. He tells us that "at this Conference the preachers fell upon a new plan in order to provide a support for the preachers' wives. They required such circuits as they thought able to raise a certain sum of money for the support of the preachers' wives in other circuits. The minute stands thus: '*Q.* What sum is to to be raised for the support of the preachers' wives? *A.* North circuits £200, South circuits £60.' The wives to be provided for, the circuits which were to raise the money, the sum to be raised, and the particular sum to be given to each preacher's wife were all specified in the Minutes. This plan was quite new, and some of the leading men in particular circuits did not approve of it, and thought it unreasonable that they should raise money for a woman they never saw, and whose husband had never preached among them. But the Methodist cause is but one in every place; and he who loves his neighbor as himself will feel for every circuit, every preacher, and every preacher's family."[1]

The question to which he refers was the eighth in the list. After this came Question 9: "How is this

[1] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 88.

sum to be raised? *Ans.* Let the preachers make a small collection in all the circuits." It will be interesting also to quote in this connection the sixteenth and seventeenth questions with their answers:

"*Ques.* 16. How many preachers' wives are to be provided for?

"*Ans.* Eleven.

"Sisters—Forrest, Everett, Hagerty,
Mair, Kimble, Pigman,
Wyatt, Ellis, Dickins.
Thomas, Watters,

"*Ques.* 17. How is this money to be raised?

"*Answer*—

Alleghany	4*l.*	*Brought up*	82*l.*
Berkeley	6	Pennsylvania	30
Fairfax	10	East and West Jersey	30
Frederick	8	Dover	20
Calvert	6	Somerset	8
Baltimore	30	Annamessex	6
Dorchester	12	Talbot	10
Little York	6	Kent	20
Carried up	82*l.*		206*l.*

This was the earliest apportionment for a common cause in the history of American Methodism, and was an effort to solve the problem of carrying on an itinerancy when the preachers were married men with families. At first the Methodist ministers in the American itinerancy were single men, who could easily be moved from point to point at will, and could subsist on a meager support; and in that day the marriage of a Methodist preacher almost invariably meant his retirement from the "traveling ministry," or his entrance into the ministry of some other denomination. But as the married ministers increased in number

and the work grew and became more permanent, it was found necessary to provide a more liberal support, so that the services of experienced ministers might be retained.

A new minute was made in reference to local preachers who held slaves where they might give them their freedom, as follows:

"*Ques.* 10. What shall be done with our local preachers who hold slaves, contrary to the laws which authorize their freedom, in any of the United States?

"*Ans.* We will try them another year. In the meantime let every assistant deal faithfully and plainly with every one, and report to the next Conference. It may then be necessary to suspend them.

In 1780 the Conference disapproved of the distillation of spirituous liquors; this Conference expressed itself against making, selling, and drinking them. Thus it was asked:

"*Ques.* 11. Should our friends be permitted to make spirituous liquors, sell, and drink them in drams?

"*Ans.* By no means; we think it wrong in its nature and consequences, and desire all our preachers to teach the people by precept and example to put away this evil."

Lee naively remarks: "At that time it was but seldom known that a Methodist preacher drank spirituous liquors, unless in cases of extreme necessity."[1]

The previous year four general fast-days were ordered. This year two were appointed, for "the first Friday in January and April; and, for the first

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, p. 83.

time, thanksgiving-days were decreed, in the following form:

"*Ques.* 14. How many days of thanksgiving shall we have for our public peace, temporal and spiritual prosperity, and for the glorious work of God?

"*Ans.* Two; the first Thursdays in July and October."

In the Conference of 1778 two general stewards were appointed; but from that time the Minutes make no mention of such officers until this year, when Samuel Owings and John Orick were appointed.

In answer to the thirteenth question—"*Ques.* 13. What can be done to supply the circuits with preaching in time of Conference?"—it was decided to "let the assistants engage as many local preachers as can be depended upon; and such among them as are needy, be allowed for their labor in proportion with the traveling preachers."

A new regulation was made as to the attendance of the preachers upon the Conference session. It was asked: "What preachers shall attend?" And the answer was: "The assistants, and those who are to be received into connection." This is the first limitation upon attendance on Conference. Before, any preacher could attend, and every preacher was expected to be present. Now, only the assistants, or heads of the circuits, with the preachers who were to be formally received into full membership, were expected to attend. The other preachers were to remain on their circuits.

Lee remarks that "the intercourse being now

open between us and England, we thought there was danger of preachers or members coming from that country, to preach or live among us, whose characters might not be good. In order that we might not be imposed upon, the following regulation was adopted."[1] He then quotes the following action:

"*Ques.* 12. How shall we conduct ourselves toward any European Methodists, should they come to this continent?

"*Ans.* We will not receive them without a letter of recommendation, which we have no reason to doubt the truth of."

The question this year was not "When and where shall our next Conferences be held?" but "When and where shall our next Conference be held?" and the answer was: "In Baltimore, the 4th Tuesday in May."[2] This was a direct declaration that there was really but one Conference, though for convenience it might meet in two or more sections, or, in other words, hold sessions in different places.

Mr. Lee tells us that in the latter part of this year Mr. Wesley "wrote a letter to America which agreed with" the Minute in regard to receiving Methodists from Europe.[3] This is probably the letter to which Mr. Asbury refers in his journal for December 24th. He was at that time in the northeastern part of North Carolina. The entry is as follows:

"Wednesday, 24. Set out in the rain to Hartfordtown—I spoke in a tavern. The people seemed wild and wicked alto-

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 85.
[2] Printed Minutes, 1773-1813, p. 42.
[3] Jesse Lee, Hist. of Methodists, 1810, p. 85.

gether. I journeyed on through the damp weather and reached Pettigrew's about six o'clock.

"Here I received a letter from Mr. Wesley, in which he directs me to act as general assistant, and to receive no preachers from Europe that are not recommended by him, nor any in America who will not submit to me and to the Minutes of the Conference.

"I preached in Edenton to a gay, inattentive people. I was much pleased with Mr. Pettigrew; I heard him preach, and received the Lord's Supper at his hands. Thence I crossed Chowan River, and preached, journeying through Bertie, Hertford, and Northampton Counties, to considerable congregations."[1]

Lee gives the following, which he says is "an extract from that letter" written "to America:"

"BRISTOL, October 3, 1783.

"1. Let all of you be determined to abide by the Methodistic doctrine and discipline, published in the four volumes of sermons, and the notes upon the New Testament, together with the Large Minutes of the Conference.

"2. Beware of preachers coming from Great Britain or Ireland without a full recommendation from me. Three of our traveling preachers here eagerly desired to go to America, but I could not approve of it by any means, because I am not satisfied that they thoroughly like either our discipline or doctrine. I think they differ from our judgment in one or both. Therefore, if these or any others come without my recommendation, take care how you receive them.

"3. Neither should you receive any preachers, however recommended, who will not be subject to the American Conference, and cheerfully conform to the Minutes both of the English and American Conferences.

"4. I do not wish our American brethren to receive any who make any difficulty of receiving Francis Asbury as the general assistant.

"Undoubtedly the greatest danger to the work of God in America is likely to arise either from preachers coming from

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 363.

Europe, or from such as will arise from among yourselves speaking perverse things, or bringing in among you new doctrines, particularly Calvinian. You should guard against this with all possible care, for it is far easier to keep them out than to thrust them out.

"I commend you all to the grace of God, and am your affectionate friend and brother, JOHN WESLEY."[1]

This letter was an assertion of Wesley's authority over the American Methodists. In it Wesley gives an explicit recognition of the regulations in the American Minutes as binding upon the American preachers, and also gives an authoritative recognition of Francis Asbury as his general assistant in America. So Asbury was the head of American Methodism, not only by the agreement of the American preachers, but also by the direct recognition of Mr. Wesley.

As before stated, the Conference of 1783 fixed Baltimore as the seat of the next Conference, using the singular instead of the plural, and so the heading to the printed Minutes for 1784 states that it "begun at Ellis's Preaching-house, Virginia, April 30, 1784, and ended at Baltimore, May 28th, following." That is to say, it was the same Conference. As Lee remarks: "In 1784 the twelfth Conference began at Ellis's chapel, in Virginia, on the 30th day of April, and ended in Baltimore on the 28th of May. It was considered as but one Conference, although they met first in Virginia, and then adjourned to Baltimore,

[1] Jesse Lee, Hist. of Methodists, 1810, pp. 85, 86; Rev. James Youngs, A. M., Hist. of Rise and Progress of Methodism, New Haven, 1830, pp. 280, 281; W. P. Strickland, Life of Francis Asbury, New York, 1858, pp. 131 132; A Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865, Vol. II, pp. 181, 182.

where the business was finished."[1] Asbury records very little that occurred at the first session of this year, simply remarking that it lasted two days; that Mr. O'Kelly "gave a good sermon," and Mr. Jarratt "gave a good discourse," and that "the business was conducted with uncommon love and unity."[2]

All that he says about the session at Baltimore is found in four lines: "Tuesday, 25. Our Conference began, all in peace. William Glendenning had been devising a plan to lay me aside, or at least to abridge my powers. Mr. Wesley's letter settled the point, and all was happy. The Conference rose on Friday morning."[3]

It would appear from this that Mr. Glendenning, who had come from England in 1774, and entered the Conference on trial in 1775, was not satisfied with the great power possessed by Mr. Asbury, and it is probable that he was an exponent of the views of others; but the training of years, in respect for and submission to Mr. Wesley, caused him, and those he represented, to abandon their effort to depose Mr. Asbury or to limit his authority, when there was produced a letter from Mr. Wesley, in which he practically reappointed Mr. Asbury to be his general assistant in America. This doubtless was the letter already quoted. Dr. Stevens says: "The letter by which Asbury silenced the opposition of Glendenning was addressed by Wesley to the Conference."[4] That

[1] Rev. Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 86.
[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 367. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] A. Stevens, History of the M. E. Church, 1865, Vol. II, p. 181.

the letter was addressed to the Conference is not improbable, but there is no evidence of that excepting in the form of the letter. Lee says Wesley "wrote a letter to America."[1] And it may be that it was addressed to the American Methodists generally, and sent to the care of Mr. Asbury. It is a little singular that Wesley's works do not contain this letter and that Asbury does not give it in his journal, at least in substance. Even Lee does not profess to present the entire letter, but only that which he calls "an extract." Youngs, Strickland, and Stevens doubtless copy from Jesse Lee's History, and he appears to be the only one of that day who professes to give even an extract from the letter.

It is quite evident, however, that the whole or part of such a letter was read to the Conference. This is implied in Asbury's reference, and Lee, after referring to certain transactions in the Conference, remarks that "The Conference then adopted the directions which Mr. Wesley had written in the latter part of the preceding year, and formed a rule to take in the substance of that letter. We agreed that if any European Methodist preachers should come over, recommended by Mr. Wesley, and would be subject to the American Conference, preach the Methodist doctrine, keep the circuits they were appointed to, and be subject to Francis Asbury as general assistant, while he stands approved by Mr. Wesley and the Conference, we will receive them; but if they walk contrary to the above directions, no appointment

[1] Lee's History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 85.

shall prevent them from being excluded from our connection."[1] Lee's statement is sufficiently accurate for general purposes; but the exact action of the Conference is as follows:

"*Ques.* 21. How shall we conduct ourselves towards European preachers?

"*Ans.* If they are recommended by Mr. Wesley, will be subject to the American Conference, preach the doctrine taught in the four volumes of Sermons and Notes on the New Testament, keep the circuits they are appointed to, follow the directions of the London and American Minutes, and be subject to Francis Asbury as general assistant, whilst he stands approved by Mr. Wesley and the Conference, we shall receive them; but if they walk contrary to the above directions, no ancient right or appointment shall prevent their being excluded from our connection."[2]

This acknowledges the authority of Mr. Wesley, and under him the authority of Mr. Asbury. It recognizes the Large English Minutes as law in America as well as in Great Britain, and indorses the American Minutes as binding upon those who serve in the United States. It will be noticed that there is a little intimation of power as conceded to "the Conference" in relation to Mr. Asbury. The "European preachers" were to "be subject to Francis Asbury as general assistant, whilst he stands approved by Mr. Wesley and *the Conference*," as though Asbury might be removed from office whenever "the Conference" disapproved of his course. The intimation is expressed timidly and a little ambiguously, but it is like the early light of morning

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, pp. 88, 89.
[2] Printed Minutes, American Conferences, 1773-1813, p. 43.

indicating the coming day. Perhaps the phrase was a concession which grew out of discussion started by Glendenning's opposition to Asbury's absolute power—a suggestion to the effect that the right of government naturally belonged to the Conference, and that some day it might assert its natural right to control. Asbury had been chosen and empowered by the Conference, and, therefore, the answer seems to mean that the Conference could take back that which it had given, and that, if it did so, Asbury would thereby be deposed from his superintendency; but at the same time the answer acknowledges the authority of Mr. Wesley.

The Minutes show that the Conference of 1784 considered a number of practical matters. The question was asked, "How shall we reform our singing?" and the answer was, "Let all our preachers who have any knowledge of the notes improve it by learning to sing true themselves, and keeping close to Mr. Wesley's tunes and hymns," an answer that might surprise those who do not know that the early Methodists sung "by note," and that Mr. Wesley published music for them to sing. Even in that day the musical part of the service was deemed of great moment.

Financial matters had their share of attention.

Question 15 was: "How shall we enlarge the Conference collection to supply the wants of the preachers?"

Answer: "Let there be a public collection in all the principal places in the circuits, and brought to Conference."

Question 16, "What preachers' wives are to be provided for?" brought the answer:

"Sisters—Wyatt, Scott, O'Kelly,
Moore, Forrest, Drumgole,
Thomas, Pigman, Dickins;
Mair, Hagerty,
Ellis, Morris,

making thirteen as against eleven of the year before. The names of Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Scott, Mrs. Morris, Mrs. O'Kelly, and Mrs. Drumgole are new, while the names of Mrs. Everett, Mrs. Kimble, and Mrs. Watters, which were in the list of the preceding year, do not appear in this. As in the previous year, so in this, the amount for their support was apportioned to the circuits, and there was added the note: "Let every assistant preacher see that this money is collected and paid quarterly." For the first time, there is a distinction made as to the support of Mr. Asbury. It was asked:

"*Ques.* 18. What shall be allowed the General Assistant yearly?

"*Ans.* Twenty-four pounds, with his expenses for horses and traveling, brought to and paid at Conference."

In 1774 it was agreed "for every assistant to make a general collection at Easter in the circuits where they labor, to be applied to the sinking of the debts on the houses and relieving the preachers in want." This year it was asked:

"*Ques.* 10. What can be done towards erecting new chapels, and discharging the debts on those already built?

"*Ans.* Let the assistant preacher put a yearly subscription through the circuits, and insist upon every member that is not supported by charity to give something; let them sub-

scribe the first quarter, and pay the second; and the money to be applied by two general stewards."

This was the first General Church Extension Society in American Methodism. There was a new arrangement in the matter of discipline:

"*Ques.* 8. How shall we keep good order among the preachers, and provide for contingencies in the vacancy of Conference, and absence of the general assistant?

"*Ans.* Let any three assistants do what may be thought most eligible, call to an account, change, suspend, or receive a preacher till Conference."

Even in that early day there were places which were difficult to sustain, and so it was asked:

"*Ques.* 9. What can be done with those places we have long tried, and appear to grow worse every year?

"*Ans.* If you are obliged to make use of such places, to get to more valuable ones, appoint no public preaching, but only meet society in the evening, or speak to the black people."

It was deemed necessary to warn the people against extravagance in dress, and to urge the preachers to set the people an example in this particular, as will be seen by the following question and answer:

"*Ques.* 11. How shall we prevent superfluity in dress among our people?

"*Ans.* Let the preachers carefully avoid everything of this kind in themselves, and speak frequently and faithfully against it in all our societies."

The anti-slavery sentiment of the Conference again asserted itself, as follows:

"*Ques.* 12. What shall we do with our friends that will buy and sell slaves?

"*Ans.* If they buy with no other design than to hold them as slaves, and have been previously warned, they shall be expelled, and permitted to sell on no consideration."

"*Ques.* 13. What shall we do with our local preachers who will not emancipate their slaves in the States where the laws admit it?

"*Ans.* Try those in Virginia another year, and suspend the preachers in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

"*Ques.* 22. What shall be done with our traveling preachers that now are, or hereafter shall be, possessed of slaves, and refuse to manumit them where the law permits?

"*Ans.* Employ them no more."

Lee remarks: "However good the intention of the preachers might be in framing these rules, we are well assured that they never were of any particular service to our societies. Some of the slaves, however, obtained their freedom in consequence of these rules."[1] But then he wrote in 1809.

For the first time it was asked: "What preachers have died this year?" And the answer was, "Henry Medcalf and William Wright," the first of a long line which has appeared in the Minutes to this day.

A new regulation was made in reference to fast days:

"*Ques.* 23. How shall we more effectually appoint and keep days of fasting?

"*Ans.* By writing it upon every class-paper, to be the first Friday after every quarterly meeting."

The twenty-fourth and last question was: "When and where shall our next Conferences be held?" and the answer was: "The first at Green Hills (North Carolina) Friday, 29th, and Saturday, 30th, of April;

[1] Rev. Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 88.

the second in Virginia, at Conference Chapel, May 8th; the third in Maryland, Baltimore, the 15th day of June."[1]

So that now the work has increased to such an extent that it is necessary to have three meeting-places for the Conference—one in North Carolina, one in Virginia, and one in Maryland.

Lee says: "Here end the Minutes that were formerly taken and kept in manuscript, and not printed until 1795. After this all our Annual Minutes were printed every year."[2] That is to say, the Minutes taken from 1773 to 1784 inclusive were kept in manuscript until 1795. Beginning with the Conference of 1785, the Minutes of each Conference were published annually. In 1795 the printed Minutes were collected, and with the Minutes from 1773 to 1784, were printed in one volume,[3] and in 1813 the Minutes of all the Conferences from 1773 down to that date were published in a single volume.

It was the end of the period of manuscript Minutes, and, as will be seen, it was the end of the Colonial period, so to speak, of American Methodism.

The American colonies had become an independent nation and American Methodism was about to become an independent Church.

But before we take leave of this preliminary stage of American Methodism, let us glance at the picture

[1] Minutes 1773-1813, pp. 43-48.
[2] Jesse Lee, Hist. of Methodists, 1810, p. 89. [3] *Id.*, p. 45.

of the Conference of 1784, as given us by the Rev. Thomas Ware. He says:

"In the spring of 1784, the Conference sat at Baltimore, which was the first I attended. There was quite a number of preachers present. Although there were but few on whose heads time had begun to snow, yet several of them appeared to be wayworn and weather-beaten into premature old age. The whole number of itinerant preachers in America at that time was eighty-three; stations and circuits, sixty-four; and members in society, fourteen thousand nine hundred and eighty-eight. I doubt whether there ever has been a Conference among us in which an equal number could be found in proportion to the whole so dead to the world and so gifted and enterprising as were present at the Conference of 1784. They had much to suffer at that early period of our history and especially during the Revolutionary struggle.

"Among these pioneers, Asbury, by common consent, stood first and chief. There was something in his person, his eye, his mien, and in the music of his voice which interested all who saw and heard him. He possessed much natural wit, and was capable of the severest satire; but grace and good sense so far predominated, that he never descended to anything beneath the dignity of a man and a Christian minister. In prayer he excelled. Had he been equally eloquent in preaching, he would have excited universal admiration as a pulpit orator. But when he was heard for the first time, the power and unction with which he prayed would naturally so raise the expectation of his auditors that they were liable to be disappointed with his preaching; for, although he always preached well, in his sermons he seldom, if ever, reached that high and comprehensive flow of thought and expression—that expansive and appropriate diction—which always characterized his prayers. This may be accounted for, in part at least, from the fact stated by the late Rev. Freeborn Garrettson in preaching his funeral sermon. 'He prayed,' said the venerable Garrettson, 'the best, and he prayed the most of any man I ever knew.' His long-continued rides prevented his preaching as often as some others; but he could find a throne of grace, if not a congregation, upon the road. Next to him, in the esti-

mation of many, stood the placid Tunnell, the philosophical Gill, and the pathetic Pedicord. It would be difficult to determine to which of these primitive missionaries, as men of eminent talents and usefulness, the preference should be given."[1]

Such is the passing glance which a contemporary gives us of the Conference of that day. There were other noted men he does not take time to point out; but above them all looms the strongest character, namely, that of Asbury. In spite of the pressing demands of the preachers and people for that which was deemed absolutely necessary for their Christian welfare, he had held American Methodism in allegiance to what he believed was right. Though at one time a seceder from the regular Conference, which represented the majority, he had, by his mighty will, swung the regular Conference into line with his seceding Conference, and made them one. He evidently believed that it was the duty of Methodists in America to remain in obedience to Mr. Wesley, and in submission to what he understood were the traditions of early Wesleyan Methodism as to the sacraments. Many will hold that under such circumstances of extreme need he was in error; but whether he was right or wrong, it must be admitted that what he accomplished was a great achievement, showing vast personal power on his part, and on the part of the people great devotion to Wesley and traditional Methodism.

Whatever may be thought of his ideas or the

[1] Autobiography of Rev. Thomas Ware, New York, 1840, p. 83.

means employed, the fact remains that through his efforts American Methodism at this time presented a united Conference in allegiance to Mr. Wesley, and awaiting his direction.

The Conference had little if any actual power in a legal sense. Indeed, it may be said that its only power was in the influence of the expressed sentiments of its members.

With the exception of a short interval, in which the Virginia Conference experimented in the matter of self-government, the American Conference had no real control of its own affairs.

It began in 1773 with a recognition of Mr. Wesley and the Large English Minutes. It conceded the right of Mr. Wesley to direct, and, with great emphasis, confessed its duty to obey his commands. There was something in the nature of home rule; for regulations were made for local affairs without direct appeal to Mr. Wesley, but these were made because of necessities arising out of new conditions in the new country; but even they were subordinate to Wesley, and not contrary to the English Minutes.

Even Mr. Asbury himself was chosen by the preachers, in several sessions of the Conference, on the ground that he had at one time been appointed by Mr. Wesley as his assistant in America; and, on the same principle, as the supposed representative of Wesley, they conceded to him power similar to that which Wesley himself would have used had he been in America. Thus, on the question as to how far Asbury's power as general assistant should extend, they

agreed that "on hearing every preacher for and against what is in debate, the right of determination shall rest with him according to the Minutes."[1] It would appear, therefore, that the Conference had no right to decide, though it might debate. Doubtless the opinions expressed by the members of the Conference modified Asbury's views in regard to many matters, yet he remained the authority to decide, and they took no action against his will. The members of the Conference had a right to speak for or against any proposition, but "the right of determination" rested with Mr. Asbury. It was personal government of a very absolute character.

In the primitive conditions of the organization, and the peculiar conditions of the country at that time, it had some redeeming features, for it gave unity to the work amid unsettled surroundings and a shifting ministry. Times, however, were changing, and methods likewise must change; and, notwithstanding the personal authority of Asbury, there were already indications in the expressed feelings of individuals, and even in the under-current of the Conference, that pointed to a time when the Conference would be supreme.

[1] Printed Minutes, 1773–1813, p. 20.

CHAPTER VII.

WESLEY'S PLAN FOR THE REORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN METHODISM.

THE year 1784 brings us to the time when Wesley drew, signed, and enrolled the Deed of Declaration by which the Conference in Great Britain was legally defined, and by which, on the death of Mr. Wesley in 1791, the Conference was invested with supreme governing power.

Having provided for the perpetuity of British Methodism, he again turns his thoughts toward America. This was in harmony with the principles which controlled him; for if it was necessary to devise some plan to perpetuate Methodism in Britain it was equally urgent that some plan should be provided for the branch across the Atlantic.

Haste was necessary; for Wesley was eighty-one years of age, and the appeals from America had been many and pressing. The mass of the American Methodists were without the sacraments; for there were very few clergymen of the Church of England left in the new country. Throughout the land there was general sacramental destitution. Children and adults went unbaptized, and the people were not permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper. Now was the time for Wesley, the recognized head of the American Methodists, to act. If he delayed, death

might prevent his acting. If he hesitated longer, the preachers and societies which Asbury had held together might be scattered and lost; for it was only their reverence for Wesley that induced the majority to yield their convictions and await his action.

The time had come; for English ecclesiastical law no longer applied to that part of North America. The former Colonies were now an independent country, and the Church of England had no authority in the United States of America. Wesley recognized not only the changed political condition of the new country, but also its changed ecclesiastical status. He therefore felt free to act; for his regard for the English State Church, which had heretofore restrained him, did not bind him as to a country where that State Church did not exist.

He had long held that bishops and presbyters were the same clerical order, and, as he reasoned, had "the same right to ordain." As he could not induce the English bishops to ordain any of his preachers for America, he determined to exercise the power which he believed vested in presbyters; so he selected Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as the persons he would ordain and send to America.

In his journal, under date of September 1, 1784, he says: "Being now clear in my own mind, I took a step which I had long weighed in my mind, and appointed Mr. Whatcoat and Mr. Vasey to go and serve the desolate sheep in America, which I verily believe, will be much to the glory of God."[1] In

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. IV, p. 602.

these ordinations he was assisted by the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., and the Rev. James Creighton,[1] both of whom had been regularly ordained in the Church of England, and both of these presbyters appear in the list of members of the English Wesleyan Conference as mentioned in the Deed of Declaration.

Referring to this matter about two years later, Wesley says: "Judging this [namely, the peculiar condition of the societies in America after the war] to be a case of necessity, I took a step which, for peace and quietness, I had refrained from taking many years; I exercised that power which I am fully persuaded the great Shepherd and Bishop of the Church has given me. I appointed three of our laborers to go and help them, by not only preaching the word of God, but likewise administering the Lord's Supper and baptizing their children throughout that vast tract of land."[2]

As we have in another work discussed Wesley's right to ordain under such circumstances, we will not present the arguments in this place.[3]

Having ordained these ministers for America, it is plain that he intended that the Methodists in America should receive the sacraments from their own ordained ministers, and that in this particular they should be independent of all other ecclesiastical bodies.

He intended not only that they should have the

[1] Coke and Moore's Life of Wesley, p. 459; Drew's Life of Coke, p. 73; Tyerman's Life of Wesley, Vol. III, p. 434.

[2] English Minutes, 1786; Drew's Life of Coke, Amer. Ed., 1847, p. 73.

[3] See The Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism, by Rev. T. B. Neely, Ph. D., D. D., New York, 1888, pp. 86-234.

sacraments from their own ministers, but also that they should have a supervisional government; and so he "appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America,"[1] thus expressing his desire that there should be a superintendency to supervise or oversee the work in America. To this office Mr. Wesley set apart the Rev. Dr. Coke, and gave him a certificate to that effect in the following testimonial letter:

"*To all to whom these presents shall come,* JOHN WESLEY, late Fellow of Lincoln College, in Oxford, Presbyter of the Church of England, sendeth greeting:

"Whereas, many of the people in the Southern provinces of North America who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, are greatly distressed for want of ministers to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper according to the usage of the same Church; and whereas, there does not appear to be any other way of supplying them with ministers—

"Know all men, that I, John Wesley, think myself to be providentially called at this time to set apart some persons for the work of the ministry in America; and therefore, under the protection of Almighty God, and with a single eye to his glory, I have this day set apart as a superintendent, by the imposition of my hands and prayer (being assisted by other ordained ministers), Thomas Coke, Doctor of Civil Law, a presbyter of the Church of England,

[1] Circular Letter to American Methodists, 1784. See pp. 231-234.

and a man whom I judge to be well qualified for that great work. And I do hereby recommend him to all whom it may concern as a fit person to preside over the flock of Christ.

"In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, this second day of September, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-four. JOHN WESLEY."[1]

It will be noticed that this arrangement was intended for the "Southern provinces of North America;" that is to say, the part not under British control, or, in other words, the United States of America. The letter also shows that he understood that the American Methodists adhered "to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England," but he does not intimate that he desires them to be a part of the Church of England. On the contrary, in another letter he declares they are "totally disentangled" from that body, and says that he "dare not entangle them again."[2] There seems to be, however, an intimation that he desired them to be somewhat like the Anglican Church in "doctrine and discipline," and it is well known that he preferred the episcopal form of government.

It must be inferred, also, that Mr. Wesley intended that the new superintendency should be different from the position of the former assistant or general assistant. The change of name indicates a change in the character of the office, and the certificate given to Dr.

[1] Samuel Drew, Life of Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., New York, 1847, p. 74.

[2] Wesley's Circular Letter to American Methodists, 1784, p. 283.

Coke states that the superintendent is "to preside over the flock of Christ." His office, therefore, was a presidency, and it is interesting to note that the phrase "the flock of Christ" occurs in the Church of England service for consecrating a bishop, where the person being made a bishop is exhorted to "be to the flock of Christ a shepherd," and, in the same service, the lesson from the twentieth chapter of Acts contains the passage, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God." "The flock of Christ" was the Church. What, therefore, could Mr. Wesley mean, if he did not mean that the superintendent was to preside over or oversee a Church?

Doubtless Mr. Wesley had strong reasons for setting apart Dr. Coke in the manner he did, but it is not necessary at this time to dwell upon the details.[1]

Mr. Wesley intended not only that his followers in America should have an ordained ministry and a supervisional government, but also a formulated creed, and so he provided Articles of Religion. These Articles were taken from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England; but some of the Anglican Articles were stricken out, and parts of others were eliminated, so that the Articles he prepared for the American Methodists numbered only twenty-four.[2] It follows,

[1] For fuller treatment see Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism, by Rev. T. B. Neely, Ph. D., D. D., New York, 1888, pp. 213-229.

[2] Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America, London, 1784.

therefore, that as his Twenty-four Articles differed from the Anglican Thirty-nine, Wesley intended the creed of the American Methodists should thus differ from that of the Established Church of England.

Wesley also prepared a regular Service-book from the English Book of Common Prayer. This was called "The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America," and was printed in London in 1784, and was brought to America by Dr. Coke. This Service-book had morning and evening prayers for Sabbath mornings and evenings, and a Litany which was to be read on Wednesdays and Fridays.[1]

It also contained prayers and services for special occasions. Of these the most important were the forms of service for sacramental seasons, and the forms of service for setting apart and ordaining persons to the ministry.

This certainly meant that Wesley intended American Methodism to be put on a different footing. He appointed superintendents and sent three ordained ministers. That he did not mean that they should be the only ordained ministers is manifest from the fact that he furnished them with services to be used in ordaining others, so that those he sent were to be but the beginning of the line of ordained American Methodist ministers.

That he did not mean this should be a temporary arrangement is proved by the Liturgy, by the forms for the sacramental occasions, and by the Articles of

[1] The Service-book was used in the Churches for years, but gradually fell into disuse.

Religion to which we have referred. The American Methodists were to have not only a more formal government, but also symbols of faith, fixed forms for the various services, with their own ordained clergy, not only to preach as evangelists, but to administer the sacraments as pastors.

What could this mean unless it meant that the Methodists in the United States of America were to become a Church which would have some resemblance to the Church of England, but should be as diffrent from that Church as the new Service-book was different from the Book of Common Prayer on which it was based, but from which it differed in a number of vital particulars? What could it mean but that while it had a system of oversight, it should be a Church differing from the modern Church of England in its doctrine of episcopal orders as Wesley did in his views which he formulated in the statement "that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain?"

But let Mr. Wesley speak for himself. With Dr. Coke, he sent a Circular Letter to the American Methodists, and a careful study of this letter will reveal his intention. It is as follows:

"BRISTOL, September 10, 1784.

"To DR. COKE, MR. ASBURY, and our Brethren in North America,—

"1. By a very uncommon train of providences, many of the provinces of North America are totally disjoined from their mother country, and erected into independent States. The English Government has no

authority over them, either civil or ecclesiastical, any more than over the States of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the Congress, partly by the provincial Assemblies; but no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation, some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice; and in compliance with their desire, I have drawn up a little sketch.

"2. Lord King's 'Account of the Primitive Church' convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and, consequently, have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned, from time to time, to exercise this right by ordaining part of our traveling preachers; but I have still refused, not only for peace's sake but because I was determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the National Church to which I belonged.

"3. But the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops who have a legal jurisdiction; in America there are none, neither any parish ministers; so that for some hundred miles together there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order and invade no man's right by appointing and sending laborers into the harvest.

"4. I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America, as also Richard

Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey to act as elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper. And I have prepared a liturgy little differing from that of the Church of England (I think the best constituted National Church in the world), which I advise all the traveling preachers to use on the Lord's-day, in all the congregations—reading the Litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's-day.

"5. If any one will point out a more rational and Scriptural way of feeding and guiding those poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present I can not see any better method than that I have taken.

"6. It has, indeed, been proposed to desire the English bishops to ordain part of our preachers for America. But to this I object: (1) I desired the Bishop of London to ordain only one, but could not prevail. (2) If they consented, we know the slowness of their proceedings; but the matter admits of no delay. (3) If they would ordain them now, they would likewise expect to govern them; and how grievously would this entangle us! (4) As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church; and we judge it best that they should stand fast in that

liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free. JOHN WESLEY."[1]

Wesley's own words show that he intended American Methodism to be separate from the Church of England and from all other ecclesiastical bodies in the United States; that the American Methodists should have their own ordained clergy, and all the privileges and ordinances a complete Church could give; that they should differ from the Church of England and other ecclesiastical organizations according to the peculiarities of the polity, the doctrines, and the services he had given them; and that they should have a supervisory government, with superintendents overseeing the work and presiding over presbyters, but that the government should be on a presbyterial basis, with a superintendency of a presbyterial order.

Wesley's declaration "that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain," was not only in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament, but also was absolutely necessary to give consistency to his course in ordaining ministers. What is more, it became the basal principle of Methodist polity as to clerical orders, so that Methodism holds there is no higher order than that of the presbyter, and considers the right of ordination as vesting in the presbyters; and, hence, that a bishop is simply a superintending presbyter.

[1] Wesley's Works, Amer. Ed., Vol. VII, pp. 311, 312; Drew's Life of Dr. Coke, New York, 1847, pp. 75, 76; Tyerman's Life of Wesley, Vol. III, pp. 435, 436.

A religious body with all these arrangements pertaining to the organization and work of a Christian Church could be nothing less than a Church. So Dr. Coke observes that "Mr. Wesley, after long deliberation, saw it his duty to form his society in America into an independent Church; but he loved the most excellent Liturgy of the Church of England; he loved its rites and ceremonies, and therefore adopted them in most instances for the present case."[1]

In view of the fact that Mr. Wesley considered the Church of England as no longer in "the Southern provinces of North America," it may be asked whether he did not intend the reorganized American Methodist body to be the real successor of the Anglican Church in the United States. The Liturgy, the Articles of Religion, and the various forms of service appear to give some support to such a suggestion.

However that may be, it is plain that he intended American Methodism should have everything essential to a complete Church, and that its members should not be lacking in any Church privilege.

In these arrangements we find Wesley's answer to the many appeals for aid that had come time and again from America.

[1] The Rev. Dr. Coke's Sermon at the Consecration of Asbury.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ORGANIZING CONFERENCE OF 1784.

THE Rev. Dr. Coke, the Rev. Richard Whatcoat, and the Rev. Thomas Vasey, having been duly commissioned by Mr. Wesley, the head of American as well as European Methodism, sailed from Bristol, England, on the 18th of September, 1784.[1] Whatcoat and Vasey were ordained elders on the 1st of September. On the 2d of September Dr. Coke was "set apart as a superintendent." The preface to the Service-book was written on the 9th of September, and the circular letter was written on the 10th of the same month; and now, on the 18th, the three men, chosen by Mr. Wesley to inaugurate a new era in American Methodism, sail for the port of New York. Coke's companions are worthy of more than a passing notice.

Thomas Vasey was left an orphan at an early age, but was cared for by a wealthy and childless uncle, who adopted him as the heir to his property. The nephew experienced conversion among the Methodists, and this so excited the indignation of the uncle, who was a rigid Churchman, that he threatened to disinherit the nephew if he joined any of Wesley's societies. Thomas Vasey was not moved by this

[1] Date given by Coke in Extracts from Dr. Coke's Journal, London, 1793, p. 7.

threat, but feeling that with him it was a matter of conscience, he sacrificed his present comfort and prospective wealth, and became not only a member of one of the societies, but also a Methodist itinerant. He had been a preacher about nine years when Wesley's presbytery ordained him an elder.

Richard Whatcoat, like Thomas Vasey, was born in England. At the time of his ordination he had been a Wesleyan preacher fifteen years, having entered the Conference in 1769, the very year Boardman and Pilmoor, Wesley's first missionaries, started for America.

Dr. Abel Stevens has justly said: "Richard Whatcoat was one of the saintliest men in the primitive itinerancy of Methodism. Had he been a papist he might have been canonized."[1] One of his biographers states that it might be said of him as of St. Basil, "that so much divine majesty and luster appeared in him, it made the wicked tremble to behold him." Continuing, he declares: "In him were seen majesty and love. His whole deportment was beautiful, and adorned with personal graces. His amiable, heavenly, and courteous carriage was such as to make him the delight of his acquaintances. He was a man of fortitude; he appeared to fear no danger when duty was plain (as his labors and troubles showed), believing that he who walks uprightly walks safely, though he pass 'through the valley of the shadow of death.'"[2]

[1] A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. II, p 157.
[2] Dr. Phœbus's Mems. of Bishop Whatcoat, New York, 1828, p. 58.

Such were the two presbyters who accompanied Dr. Coke on the mission to reorganize the Methodist societies in the United States.

We have already seen that Dr. Coke had become a sort of general assistant to Wesley in England and Ireland. He had been associated with Mr. Wesley about seven years, and in that time had gained great experience. Mr. Wesley and Dr. Coke alternated in annual visits to the societies in Ireland, and "in the year 1782 he was directed by Mr. Wesley to convene together the Irish preachers, and to hold, for the first time, a Conference in Dublin, upon the same principles that the Conferences in England had been conducted. . . . As the Irish were so well satisfied with his conduct as president of their Conference that they were anxious for his reappointment, he took occasion in several succeeding years to travel over as many circuits as time would permit him to visit, in order to make himself fully acquainted with the state of religion throughout the kingdom. This previous knowledge, thus acquired, enabled him to fill his station in the ensuing assembly with more confidence in himself, and with an increasing approbation from the people. And from this year, 1782, until he prepared to visit India, Dr. Coke almost invariably presided in the Irish Conference; thus filling the presidential chair with honor, approbation, and great utility for nearly thirty years."[1]

At this time, however, we are especially interested

[1] Samuel Drew, Life of Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., New York, Ed. 847, pp. 49-51.

in Dr. Coke's mission to America. Wesleyan Methodism was introduced into New York by a German Palatine from Ireland; into Maryland by an Irishman; and into Philadelphia and other places by a British officer. Wesley's first missionaries to America were English; the one who organized the Annual Conference was a Scotchman; and now Wesley sends Dr. Coke, a Welshman, to reorganize the work in America, and give it a different and more dignified status. Thus every part of the insular empire has had its representative in this mission.

After a voyage of forty-seven days, Coke and his two associates landed at New York on the 3d of November, 1784.[1]

Drew, in his life of Dr. Coke, states that, "arriving at New York in perfect health, the first care of Dr. Coke, after taking an affectionate leave of the captain and his companions on board, was to find out the Methodist preaching-house. In this inquiry he was assisted by a gentleman who, although he had no connection with the Methodists, conducted him to the house of a Mr. Sands, where he took up his abode, and found himself in a region of hospitality and friendship."[2] His host was Mr. Stephen Sands, an influential member and trustee of the John Street Church.[3]

Drew says: "The intelligence of his arrival soon brought to the house the traveling preacher stationed in that city. To him Dr. Coke unfolded the plan

[1] Samuel Drew, Life of Dr. Coke, N. Y., Ed. 1847, p. 96. [2] *Id.*, p. 97.
[3] A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865, Vol. II, p. 170.

which Mr. Wesley had adopted for the regulation and government of his societies in America. And it was no small consolation to him to learn that the plan met his entire approbation; and so confident was he of Mr. Asbury's concurrence, that he advised him immediately to make it public throughout all the societies, being fully assured that the name of Mr. Wesley would impart a degree of sanction to the measure which would disarm resistance, even if any were to be apprehended."[1]

This preacher was John Dickins, who, at that time was stationed in New York. He was a member of the Virginia Conference when it decided to authorize some of its preachers to administer the sacraments. He favored that course then, and now gladly hails the coming of an ordained ministry having the sanction of Mr. Wesley.

Dr. Coke mentions his interview with Dickins. The entry in his journal was made on the very day of his arrival in America. He says: "I have opened Mr. Wesley's plan to Brother Dickins, the traveling preacher stationed at this place (New York), and he highly approves of it; says that all the preachers most earnestly long for such a regulation, and that Mr. Asbury, he is sure, will agree to it. He presses me earnestly to make it public, because, as he most justly argues, Mr. Wesley has determined the point, and, therefore, it is not to be investigated but complied with."[2]

---

[1] Samuel Drew, Life of Dr. Coke, New York, Ed. 1847, p. 97.
[2] Dr. Coke's Journal, November 3, 1784.

Reasoning from accepted principles, this was certainly most logical. The American Methodists had recognized Mr. Wesley as their chief, and had agreed to obey his authority. His power was supreme among the Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic, and on the theory constantly advanced by Asbury and held by the Conference generally, it was not for them to question what Wesley did, but to obey his commands and to follow his suggestions. Consistency would compel Asbury and his followers to accept Wesley's arrangement the moment it was made known. Under their theory it was not necessary that all or any of them should be consulted, but simply that they be informed.

The logic of John Dickins was sound, but the course suggested would not have been wise. Therefore, "that nothing might be done precipitately, Dr. Coke declined carrying the advice into execution until he had seen Mr. Asbury, to whom he had a particular message, although they were personally unknown to each other, that they might act in concert and take no step that should not be the result of calm deliberation."[1]

That Dr. Coke was to be sent to America seems to have been announced prior to his coming; for he remarks: "By some means or other the whole country has been, as it were, expecting, and Mr. Asbury looking out for me for some time."

Having preached a few times in New York, Dr. Coke, without further delay, starts southward in

[1] Samuel Drew, Life of Dr. Coke, New York, Ed. 1847, pp. 97, 98.

search of Mr. Asbury. Three days after his landing in the new country Dr. Coke reached Philadelphia, and, after a few days, went into the State of Delaware. In some way he appears to have obtained information as to Asbury's itinerary, for he moves as directly toward him as if he knew that on a certain day Asbury would be in a certain place.

Freeborn Garrettson tells us that: "In August 1784, I received a letter from Brother F. A. [Francis Asbury] in which I was desired to prepare for a journey to Charleston as quick as possible. At that time I was traveling in Talbot Circuit, and had great freedom among the people. . . . I went as far as Dover, and intended to stay at R. B.'s, Esq. [Richard Bassett], a few days. The evening following a friend came to my room, and informed me that Dr. Coke had arrived and was below. I went down, and received him and Brother W. [Whatcoat] as welcome messengers."[1]

Richard Bassett was not only a prominent Methodist, but he was also one of the distinguished citizens of the State of Delaware. In 1787 he was a member of the Convention that framed the Constitution of the United States. Subsequently he was a member of the United States Congress and Governor of the State of Delaware, and in the latter part of his life he was Judge of the United States District Court. It was to the house of this honored man, then a member of the Executive Council of the State, that Dr. Coke and the Rev. Richard Whatcoat came on Saturday,

[1] Garrettson's Autobiography, p. 197.

the 13th of November, 1784; and it is remarkable that in this very house in Dover, Delaware, Whatcoat died in 1806.

On the very day of their arrival it would appear that a quarterly meeting was in progress at Barratt's Chapel; for at that time the quarterly meetings, wherever practicable, began on Saturday and continued the following Sunday.

Barratt's Chapel, which was situated near Frederica, Delaware, had been built by Judge Philip Barratt, another prominent layman of early Methodism in Delaware. When the chapel was in course of erection, in 1780, a gentleman asked what it was for. On being told that it was to be a place of worship for the Methodists, he exclaimed: "It is unnecessary to build such a house, for by the time the war is over a corn-crib will hold them all." However, he did not prove to be a true prophet, for in the four years from 1780 to 1784 the Methodists almost doubled their numbers. In the former year they had 42 preachers and 8,504 members, while in the latter year they had 83 preachers and 14,988 members.[1] What would he now say if he knew of the millions of Methodists in the United States to-day?

Freeborn Garrettson, who happened to be at Judge Bassett's, became the guide to conduct Dr. Coke and Mr. Whatcoat to the quarterly meeting at Barratt's Chapel. He states that he "accompanied them the next day [after their arrival at Dover] to a quarterly meeting held at Barratt's Chapel. Dear Mr. Wesley

[1] Printed Minutes, 1773-1813, pp. 27, 46.

had gratified the desires of thousands of his friends in America in sending a power of ordination and giving his consent to our becoming a separate Church."[1]

This was Sunday, November 14, 1784. The circumstances lead us to infer that Dr. Coke had been informed that Mr. Asbury was expected at this quarterly meeting, and that he had moved so quickly from New York in order that he might have an interview with the other man who had been selected by Mr. Wesley to serve as superintendent of the reorganized Methodism in America. Dr. Coke has left a brief account of his visit to Barratt's Chapel, which he says was "so-called from the name of our friend who built it, and who went to heaven a few days ago." "In this chapel," he adds, "in the midst of a forest, I had a noble congregation, to whom I endeavored to set forth the Redeemer as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. After the sermon, a plain, robust man came up to me in the pulpit and kissed me. I thought it could be no other than Mr. Asbury, and I was not deceived. I administered the sacrament, after preaching, to five or six hundred communicants, and held love-feast. It was the best season I ever knew, except one at Charlemont in Ireland."

Though Coke probably knew that Asbury was expected at that quarterly meeting, it appears that Asbury did not know of Coke's presence until he arrived at the chapel, yet there is reason to believe that Asbury expected to meet Coke in that locality.

[1] Garrettson's Autobiography, p. 197.

Asbury says: "Sunday 15th [14th] I came to Barratt's Chapel. Here, to my great joy, I met these dear men of God, Dr. Coke and Richard Whatcoat. We were greatly comforted together. The Doctor preached on 'Christ Our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption.' Having had no opportunity of conversing with them before public worship, I was greatly surprised to see Brother Whatcoat assist by taking the cup in the administration of the sacrament."[1]

The Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, who was present when Coke and Asbury met for the first time, gives the following account of that event: "Dr. Coke and Whatcoat, leaving Vasey behind, hastened on to the South with all expedition. On the 14th of the same month, November, they met Mr. Asbury and about fifteen of the American preachers at a quarterly meeting held in Barratt's Chapel, Kent County, State of Delaware. I was then a witness with my eyes, my ears, and my heart, of one of the most solemn, interesting, and affectionate meetings. It was in full view of a large concourse of people—a crowded congregation, assembled for public worship. While Dr. Coke was preaching, Mr. Asbury came into the congregation. A solemn pause and deep silence took place at the close of the sermon, as an interval for introduction and salutation. Asbury and Coke, with great solemnity and much dignified sensibility, and with full hearts of brotherly love, approached, embraced, and saluted each other. The other preachers,

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 376.

at the same time participating in the tender sensibilities of the affectionate salutations, were melted into sweet sympathy and tears. The congregation also caught the glowing emotion, and the whole assembly, as if divinely struck with a shock of heavenly electricity, burst into a flood of tears. Every heart appeared as if filled and overflowing with love, unity, and fellowship; and a kind of ecstasy, or rapture, of joy and gladness ensued. I can never forget the affecting scene. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered by the Doctor and Mr. Whatcoat to several hundreds, and it was a blessed season to many souls, while in the holy ordinance they through faith discerned the Lord's body, and shewed forth his death, and were feasting on him in their souls by faith with thanksgiving. It is the more impressive on my mind and affecting to my recollection; for at that meeting was the first time I ever partook of the Lord's Supper, and the first time that *that* ordinance was ever administered among the Methodists in this country by their own regularly ordained preachers."[1]

This was, indeed, the opening of a new era for the American Methodists. Now, with the approval of Mr. Wesley, they had the sacraments from their own ministers. The letter sent to him in 1780, calling his attention to the fact that they were destitute of the sacraments, had at last been answered by that which would meet the demand. Part of Wesley's plan was now in actual operation.

The same day Dr. Coke presented to Asbury the

[1] Cooper on Asbury, Phila., 1819, pp. 104-105.

details of the new arrangement. Dr. Coke says: "After dining, in company with eleven of the preachers, at our Sister Barratt's, about a mile from the chapel, I privately opened our plan to Mr. Asbury. He expressed considerable doubts concerning it, which I rather applauded than otherwise, but informed me that he had received some intimations of my arrival on the continent; and as he thought it probable I might meet him on that day, and have something of importance to communicate to him from Mr. Wesley, he had therefore called together a considerable number of preachers to form a council, and if they were of opinion that it would be expedient immediately to call a conference, it should be done."[1]

This shows that Asbury was expecting to meet Dr. Coke in this locality, and about this time. It also reveals Asbury's foresight in calling so many preachers to that point at that time, that he might be fortified by their opinions. It was an astute move for himself personally, and a wise move in the interest of all concerned.

Asbury says: "I was shocked when first informed of the intention of these my brethren in coming to this country. It may be of God. My answer then was, if the preachers unanimously choose me, I shall not act in the capacity I have hitherto done by Mr. Wesley's appointment."[2]

Mr. Asbury had constantly impressed the American preachers and people with the idea that Mr.

[1] Coke's Journal, in Arminian Magazine, Phila., 1789, pp. 243, 244.
[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 376.

Wesley was supreme in Methodist affairs, and that they must be in complete subjection to him. Indeed, Asbury's authority, as the head of American Methodism, was based on the fact that once he had been appointed assistant by Mr. Wesley. Until the arrival of Dr. Coke he had been the absolute ruler in America. Now Wesley's plan was that Dr. Coke should share this power with Mr. Asbury.

Prior to this, Mr. Asbury appears to have had some apprehensions. Years before, Wesley had recalled others to England, and he had even ordered Asbury to return. What Wesley might do later he did not know. On his own theory Wesley had a right to recall him or to put another in his place. Circumstances which were very marked indicate, however, that Mr. Asbury had no thought of relinquishing the authority he swayed over preachers who were generally, if not in all cases, his juniors. Others, doubtless, wanted to retain the services of Mr. Asbury. Thus, on the 24th of May, 1783, Edward Dromgoole, who aided Asbury at the Virginia Conference, wrote to Mr. Wesley as follows:

"The preachers at present are united to Mr. Asbury, and esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake, and earnestly desire his continuance on the continent during his natural life, and to act as he does at present; to wit, to superintend the whole work and go through all the circuits once a year. He is now well acquainted with the country, with the preachers and people, and has a large share in the

affections of both; therefore they would not willingly part with him."[1]

Asbury himself wrote Wesley, on the 20th of September, 1783, suggesting his willingness to continue in his position as head of the Methodists in America. In this letter Asbury says:

"No person can manage the lay preachers here so well, it is thought, as one that has been at the raising of most of them. No man can make a proper change upon paper to send one here and another [there], without knowing the circuits and the gifts of all the preachers, unless he is always out among them. My dear sir, a matter of the greatest consequence now lies before you. If you send preachers to America, let them be proper persons. We are now united; all things go on well considering the storms and difficulties we have had to ride through. I wish men of the greatest understanding would write impartial accounts, for it would be better for us not to have preachers than to be divided. This I know; great men that can do good may do hurt if they should take the wrong road. I have labored and suffered much to keep the people and preachers together; and if I am thought worthy to keep my place, I should be willing to labor and suffer till death for peace and union."[2]

Six months later Asbury wrote Wesley: "You

[1] Arminian Magazine. 1791.

[2] J. Atkinson, D. D., Centennial History of American Methodism, New York, 1884, pp. 72, 73.

know, sir, it is not easy to rule, nor am I pleased with it; I bear it as my cross, yet it seems that a necessity is laid upon me."[1]

It is evident that Asbury was unwilling to be removed from his position of power, and there is some evidence to prove that he was not anxious to have any one sent from England to share his power. So Dr. Coke, on the 9th of August, 1784, wrote to Mr. Wesley a letter which contains the following statement: "Mr. Brackenbury informed me at Leeds that he saw a letter from Mr. Asbury, in which he observed that he would not receive any person deputed by you with any part of the superintendency of the work invested in him, or words which evidently implied so much."[2] This asserted fact Coke uses as a reason why Wesley should set him apart to the work of his office with some special ceremony, so that his authority would be more freely received in America.[3]

It was somewhat singular, as already suggested, that Asbury would object to accepting the position of superintendent solely on Wesley's appointment. Heretofore he had insisted that Wesley was the supreme authority, and that preachers and people were bound to obey him when he pronounced a decision. Yet when Mr. Wesley appoints him superintendent

---

[1] J. Atkinson, D. D., Centennial History of American Methodism, New York, 1884, pp. 72, 73.

[2] Whitehead's Life of Wesley, Vol. II, p. 417; Tyerman's Life of Wesley, Vol. III, p. 429.

[3] T. B. Neely, Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism, New York, 1884, pp. 216, 218.

he wants the matter submitted to the Conference, and asks the vote of the Conference.

There was manifestly a little inconsistency on the part of Asbury; but it was one of those inconsistencies that bring good results.

However, in submitting his superintendency to the vote of the Conference, Asbury took no risk; for he had been at least twice selected by the preachers to superintend the work, and nearly all the preachers in the body had been brought into the Conference under him. There was, therefore, no doubt as to the action of the Conference. It was a moral certainty that the body would elect him superintendent, and certainly in preference to a stranger who had just come across the sea.

Asbury took no personal risk in the submission, but, on the contrary, by the submission made his position more secure. The preachers knew him, many of them were devoted to him, and he had proved his devotion to American Methodism by refusing to return to England and by remaining in America throughout the war.

By submitting the question to the Conference, Asbury broke Wesley's complete control over the affairs of American Methodism. It was equivalent to saying that Wesley should no longer have exclusive authority, but that there was a new factor—namely, the American Conference—to be considered. If the idea was carried out, it would become a settled principle that Wesley could neither appoint nor remove a superintendent at his pleasure. By this Asbury

strengthened himself, and, as far as Wesley was concerned, seated himself more securely in his position, though he placed himself at the mercy and under the control of the Conference. If this plan was followed, Asbury would be practically independent of Wesley.

The suggestion conceded power to the Conference such as it never possessed before, and, whatever may be thought of his motive, the Church owes much to Asbury for this act. Even if his purpose was to strengthen his own personal power, its effect was the destruction of supreme personal government on the part of Wesley, Coke, Asbury, or any other individual. It destroyed personal government and placed the governing power in the Conference.

There is no evidence that Mr. Wesley intended that the matter should be submitted to the Conference, and, possibly, Dr. Coke expected that he and Mr. Asbury, acting jointly, would govern the Methodists in the United States, as Mr. Wesley did those in the British realm, or at least that they would rule under his general direction, without submitting anything to the decision of the American Conference.

Mr. Asbury, however, destroyed this vision of power, based merely on Mr. Wesley's appointment, and inaugurated a new era by refusing to act as superintendent simply under appointment by the Rev. John Wesley.

When Asbury exclaimed, as Thomas Ware declares he did, after Dr. Coke had shown him his credentials, "Doctor, we will call the preachers together,

and the voice of the preachers shall be to me the voice of God,"[1] he struck the knell of personal government, and rung in the era of government by the Conference.

Referring to Asbury's determination, the Rev. Nicholas Snethen, one of the early Methodist ministers, says: "Asbury in securing to the General Conference the election of the bishops, by declining to serve under Mr. Wesley's appointment until he was elected by the American preachers, subserved the cause of independence."[2]

After Dr. Coke heard Asbury's proposition to submit the matter to a conference of the preachers, those whom Mr. Asbury had concentrated at that point were called together for consultation.

Mr. Garrettson says: "About fifteen preachers were present."[3]

Dr. Coke tells us: "They were accordingly called, and, after debate, were unanimously of opinion that it would be best immediately to call a Conference of all the preachers on the continent."[4]

Asbury says: "The design of organizing the Methodists into an Independent Episcopal Church was opened to the preachers present, and it was agreed to call a General Conference to meet at Baltimore the ensuing Christmas; as also that Brother Garrettson go off to Virginia to give notice thereof

[1] Thomas Ware's Autobiography, New York, 1840, p. 102; Rev. Thomas Ware in Methodist Quarterly Review, Vol. XIV, 1832.

[2] Snethen's Sermon in the Christian World, 1841.

[3] Garrettson's Autobiography, p. 198.

[4] Coke's Journal in Arminian Magazine, Philadelphia, 1789, pp. 243, 244.

to our brethren in the South."[1] This "Council," as Coke termed it, in agreeing that a General Conference, or a Conference of the preachers in general, should be called, practically agreed that personal government should give way to Conference government, or, in other words, Coke, Asbury, and the council of preachers affirmed the principle that the supreme governing power was not and should not be in Asbury, Coke, or Wesley, but in the Conference of American preachers. So Garrettson and others flew over the country with the call for the Conference.

Coke says: "We therefore sent off Freeborn Garrettson like an arrow from North to South, directing him to send messengers to the right and left, and to gather all the preachers together at Baltimore on Christmas eve. Mr. Asbury has also drawn up for me a route of about a thousand miles in the meantime. He has given me his black (Harry by name), and borrowed an excellent horse for me. I exceedingly reverence Mr. Asbury; he has so much wisdom and consideration, so much meekness and love; and under all this, though hardly to be perceived, so much command and authority. He and I have agreed to use our joint endeavors to establish a school or college. I baptized here thirty or forty infants, and seven adults. We had, indeed, a precious time at the baptism of the adults."[2]

---

[1] Asbury's Journal, New York, 1821, p. 376.

[2] Dr. Coke's Journal, London, 1793; Dr. A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, N. Y., 1865, pp. 171, 172.

The latter remark illustrates the destitute condition of the people as to the sacraments. Garrettson, Coke's arrow, gives the following account: "It was concluded that I should go through the continent, and call a Conference at Baltimore immediately. Within six weeks, after traveling upwards of twelve hundred miles, I settled the business, besides preaching almost every day once, and sometimes twice; and made my return."[1] The Rev. Jesse Lee, the author of the first "History of the Methodists in the United States of America," who appears to have been missed by this "arrow," and was not present when the Conference convened, makes this comment upon Garrettson's mission:

"Mr. Freeborn Garrettson undertook to travel to the South, in order to give notice to all the traveling preachers of this intended meeting; but, being fond of preaching by the way, and thinking he could do the business by writing, he did not give timely notice to the preachers who were in the extremities of the work, and, of course, several of them were not at that Conference."[2]

It would, however, have been surprising had no one failed to receive the notification. There were no railroads, there were no telegraphs; mail facilities were very poor, and the preachers were scattered over extensive circuits, which, in many instances, required even weeks to make the circuit of their work.

---

[1] Garrettson's Antobiography; The Experience and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson, Philadelphia, 1791, p. 198.

[2] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, pp. 93, 94.

Lee in that year was located at Salisbury in the western part of North Carolina,[1] and, it seems, the notice did not reach him in time. Dr. Leroy M. Lee says: "On the 12th of December Mr. Lee received official notice, informing him that the Rev. Dr. Coke, accompanied by the Rev. Messrs. Whatcoat and Vasey, had arrived in America, delegated with authority from Mr. Wesley to erect the societies into an independent ecclesiastical organization, under a form of government the outlines of which had been supplied by Mr. Wesley himself. This notice was received only *thirteen* days before the Conference was to assemble, and he was in delicate health, and five hundred miles from the place appointed for its session; and, withal, it was a period of the year that forbade the thought of attempting the journey. He very wisely, therefore, resolved to remain on his circuit, and gave himself to such employment for the good of souls as the state of his health and the season of the year would allow him to engage in."[2] If, however, Mr. Lee at such a remote point received an "official notice," it is likely that very few failed to receive the notification

Asbury's journal furnishes some points of interest as to the interval between the Barratt's Chapel meeting and the session of the especially called Conference. The brief notes, though in a very condensed form, are exceedingly suggestive. Thus he writes:

"Delaware. I was very desirous that the Doctor should go upon the track I had just been over, which

[1] Minutes, 1784; Lee's Life of Jesse Lee, p. 125.
[2] Rev. Leroy M. Lee, D. D., Life of Rev. Jesse Lee, 1860, p. 129.

he accordingly did. I came to Dover, and preached on Eph. v, 6. Was close and, I hope, profitable.

"Maryland. Tuesday 16th (Nov.) Rode to Bohemia, where I met with Mr. Thomas Vasey, who came over with the Doctor and R. Whatcoat. My soul is deeply engaged with God, to know his will in this new business."[1]

Mr. Vasey, for some unknown reason, did not accompany Dr. Coke and Mr. Whatcoat; and this was the first interview with Asbury. Mr. Asbury informs us that on the 17th of November he "rode to quarterly meeting at Deer Creek, thence by Mr. Gough's to Baltimore." On Tuesday, the 23d, he says: "We rode twenty miles to Frederick quarterly meeting, where Brother Vasey preached on 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.' Our love-feast was attended with the power and presence of God. Leaving Frederick, I went to Calvert quarterly meeting. Brother Poythress and myself had much talk about the new plan."

On Friday, the 26th, he writes: "I observed this day as a day of fasting and prayer, that I might know the will of God in the matter that is shortly to come before our Conference. The preachers and people seem to be much pleased with the projected plan. I myself am led to think it is of the Lord. I am not tickled with the honor to be gained. I see danger in the way. My soul waits upon God. O that he may lead us in the way we should go! Part of my time

[1] Asbury's Journal, N. Y., 1821, Vol. I, p. 376.

is, and must necessarily be, taken up with preparing for the Conference."[1]

On Tuesday, 30th, Mr. Asbury makes this significant entry: "The Rev. M. W—s and myself had an interesting conversation on the subject of the episcopal mode of Church government."[2]

Saturday, December 4th, he "rode to Baltimore." On Tuesday, the 14th, he says: "I met Dr. Coke at Abingdon, Mr. Richard Dallam kindly taking him there in his coach. He preached on 'He that hath the Son hath life.' We talked of our concerns in great love.

"Wednesday, 15th. My soul was much blessed at the communion, where I believe all were more or less engaged with God. I feel it necessary to daily give up my own will. The Dr. preached a great sermon on 'He that loveth father or mother more than me,' etc.

"Saturday, 18th. Spent the day at Perry Hall, partly in preparing for Conference. My intervals of time I passed in reading the third volume of the *British Arminian Magazine*. Continued at Perry Hall until Friday, the 24th. We then rode to Baltimore, where we met a few preachers."[3]

When Asbury met Coke at Abingdon, the latter was on his way to Perry Hall. At Abingdon they were joined by William Black, an English preacher, who had founded Methodism in Nova Scotia, and was

---

[1] Asbury, Journal, N. Y., 1821, Vol. I, pp. 376, 377.
[2] *Id.*, p. 377. [3] *Ibid.*

now seeking ministerial re-enforcements for that distant province.[1]

Stevens says that "on the 17th of December all the traveling preachers, except Whatcoat, arrived under the roof of Gough, at Perry Hall." Dr. Coke referred to this noted mansion as "the most elegant house in this State," and he adds: "I have a noble room to myself, where Mr. Asbury and I may, in the course of a week, mature everything for the Conference." Mr. Black, alluded to above, speaks of Perry Hall as "the most spacious and elegant building" he had seen in America. "It is," he says, "about fifteen miles from Baltimore. Mr. Gough, its owner, is a Methodist, and supposed to be worth one hundred thousand pounds.[2] He is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. He has built a neat stone meeting-house, entertains the circuit preachers, and at times preaches himself; and thus he continued to do during the late war, at the risk of his immense estate."[3]

Whatcoat, who had been preaching on the way, arrived on the 19th of December. "The next day they began the revision of the 'Rules and Minutes,' and made other provisions for the approaching session. Four days were spent in this task, relieved by frequent religious exercises in Gough's numerous family and by the social hospitalities of the neighborhood."[4]

---

[1] A. Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, N. Y., 1865, Vol. II, p. 179.

[2] Immense wealth for that time, and equal to millions to-day.

[3] Dr. Richey's Life of Black, Halifax, 1839, p. 135.

[4] A. Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, N. Y., 1865, Vol. II, p. 180.

On Friday, the 24th of December, 1784, those who had been entertained at Mr. Gough's rode to Baltimore. There has been a difference of opinion among historians as to the date when the Conference convened. Lee has given December 27th as the date,[1] which is the date in the heading of the "Form of Discipline" adopted at that Conference, as follows: "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., the Rev. Francis Asbury, and Others, at a Conference begun in Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on Monday, the 27th of December, in the Year 1784, composing a Form of Discipline," etc.

But Asbury says they "continued at Perry Hall until Friday, the 24th. We then rode to Baltimore, where we met a few preachers."[2] Coke says: "On Christmas eve we opened our Conference,"[3] by which it is presumed he means not so much the evening as the day before Christmas. It could not have begun on the 27th; for Coke's certificate of Asbury's ordination shows that Asbury was ordained a deacon on the 25th, and on the 26th was ordained an elder.[4] This implies that the Conference was in session as early as the 25th. Asbury says they rode to Baltimore on the 24th, and Coke says the Conference opened that day. Possibly the two dates may be harmonized by accepting the 24th as the date when the

---

[1] Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 94.
[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 377. [3] Coke's Journal.
[4] Certificate of Asbury's Ordination, Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 378.

Conference convened, and the 27th as the date when the "Form of Discipline" was considered or finally adopted; or possibly the four may have been mistaken for a seven.

Whatcoat gives not only the day but the hour when the Conference opened its session. He says: "On the 24th we rode to Baltimore; at ten o'clock we began our Conference."[1]

This Conference has been called the "Christmas Conference," because it was in session during the Christmas season. Thus Asbury remarks: "We spent the whole week in Conference."[2]

The sessions were held in the Lovely Lane Chapel. Lee tells us this meeting "was considered to be a General Conference," and that "Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury presided."[3] Dr. Coke says that out of eighty-one traveling preachers, nearly sixty were present.

Stevens remarks that "Coke, on taking the chair, presented a letter from Wesley, dated Bristol, September 10, 1784."[4] This was the circular letter which has been quoted in the preceding chapter.[5]

The Rev. Thomas Ware, who was present at the "Christmas Conference," tells us that the letter was "read, analyzed, and cordially approved by the Conference."[6]

Asbury informs us, that the Conference spent the

[1] Whatcoat's Mems., p. 21.
[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 378.
[3] Lee's History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 94.
[4] A. Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865, Vol. II, p. 181.
[5] Pages 231–234.
[6] Autobiography of the Rev. Thomas Ware, 1840, pp. 105, 106.

time "debating freely, and determining all things by a majority of votes."[1]

Never before did he say that about an American Conference. Heretofore the members may have debated freely, but this is the first time we read of a Conference "determining all things by a majority of votes."

At last the Conference was supreme, and the votes of the majority took the place of the will of one man. Conference government is enthroned, and personal rule becomes a thing of the past.

Now the question is not what Mr. Wesley intended, but what did the Conference do?

Asbury states: "It was agreed to form ourselves into an Episcopal Church, and to have superintendents, elders, and deacons."[2]

As previously quoted, Asbury spoke of "the design of organizing the Methodists into an independent Episcopal Church;" now he declares that those assembled in the Conference formed themselves into an Episcopal Church. They organized a Church which was episcopal, and which was independent of all other Churches.

Thomas Ware says: "We therefore, according to the best of our knowledge, received and followed the advice of Mr. Wesley, as stated in our Form of Discipline;"[3] and Garrettson says: "We acceded to the method proposed by Mr. Wesley."[4] So they

[1] Asbury's Journal, New York, 1821, Vol. I, p. 378. [2] *Id.*, pp. 377, 378.
[3] Autobiography of Rev. Thomas Ware, New York, 1840, p. 105.
[4] Autobiography of Freeborn Garrettson, Philadelphia, 1791, p. 198.

understood that what they did was in harmony with the desire of Mr. Wesley.

William Watters, another member of that Conference, says: "We formed ourselves into a separate Church. This change was proposed to us by Mr. Wesley after we had craved his advice on the subject; but could not take effect till adopted by us, which was done in a deliberate, formal manner, at a Conference called for that purpose, in which there was not one dissenting vote."[1]

The Rev. Richard Whatcoat relates that the Conference "agreed to form a Methodist Episcopal Church, *in which the Liturgy* (as presented by Mr. Wesley) *should be read*, and the sacraments be administered by a superintendent, elders, and deacons."[2]

The "Form of Discipline" adopted by this Conference has the following:

"*Ques.* 3. As the ecclesiastical as well as the civil affairs of these United States have passed through a very considerable change by the Revolution, what plan of Church government shall we hereafter pursue?

"*Ans.* We will form ourselves into an Episcopal Church, under the direction of superintendents, elders, deacons, and helpers, according to the forms of ordination annexed to our Liturgy, and the Form of Discipline set forth in these Minutes."

The Minutes of all the transactions of this Conference do not appear to be extant, either in print or manuscript, but their lack is supplied by the testimony of participants; but the Annual Minutes

[1] Autobiography of Rev. Wm. Watters, 1806, p. 102.
[2] Whatcoat's Mems., p. 21. The italics are Whatcoat's.

for the next year, 1785, contain the following paragraph: "Therefore, at this Conference we formed ourselves into an independent Church, and, following the counsel of Mr. John Wesley, who recommended the episcopal mode of Church government, we thought it best to become an Episcopal Church, making the episcopal office elective, and the elected superintendent or bishop amenable to the body of ministers and preachers."[1]

Mr. Asbury says: "When the Conference was seated, Dr. Coke and myself were unanimously elected to the superintendency of the Church."[2]

Having thus decided upon the organization, the Conference elected various persons to deacons' and elders' orders, and, under its authority, persons were ordained deacons and elders; and Asbury was formally set apart for the office of a superintendent. Thus was organized "the Methodist Episcopal Church," or, to give its full title, "The Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America."

This Conference, as is evident, was not for the purpose of doing ordinary Conference work. It was rather of the nature of a Convention for the purpose of considering the question of organization. Yet it was a "General Conference" in the sense that the call was to the preachers generally.

Preachers from all sections responded to the call. About sixty out of a total of eighty-one preachers

[1] It is more than doubtful whether the word "bishop" appeared in the first issue of these Minutes. It was probably an insertion in the reprint.

[2] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. I, p. 378.

assembled, making, doubtless, the largest number that ever attended a Conference session in this country up to that date. It will be remembered, too, that ordinarily all the preachers were not expected to attend; for at the Conference of 1783 it was settled that "the assistants and those who are to be received into connection"[1] should be expected to attend the Conference session. This Conference, therefore, was a very representative assembly.[2]

The expressions, "We will form ourselves" and "We formed ourselves," show that its members recognized the fact that the supreme power now vested in the General Conference, or, as in the words used in the Minutes of 1785, "the body of ministers and preachers."

Nothing therefore was done by Mr. Wesley's direction, but by the Conference of preachers in the free use of the power which its members believed vested in them when in Conference assembled. They elected the superintendents, they passed upon the plan for reorganization. They formed themselves into a Church, and decided that it should be episcopal and liturgical; but they decided that it should be a Methodist Episcopal Church; that is to say, an Episcopal Church, qualified by Methodist teachings as to polity and doctrine. They decided that thereafter the episcopal office would be elective, and made those elected subject to the body of ministers.

The result was a marked change in the govern-

[1] Question 19, Minutes 1773-1813, p. 42.

[2] For further particulars see Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism, by T. B. Neely, New York, 1888, pp. 285-298.

ment of American Methodism. It was a change from personal government, vested in an individual—whether Wesley, Coke, Asbury, or any other person—to Conference government, in which all authority should vest primarily in the body of the ministry, which ministry should exercise its power when acting together as one body.

Conditions had been reversed. Instead of one man or a few men controlling the body of the ministry, the body of the ministry had become supreme, and all power—whether legislative, executive, or judicial—centered in and emanated from the ministry in Conference assembled. Personal government had passed away, and Conference government had taken its place.

Notwithstanding this, the Conference placed in its "Form of Discipline" the following:

"*Ques.* 2. What can be done in order to the future union of the Methodists?

"*Ans.* During the life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the gospel, ready in matters belonging to Church government to obey his commands. And we do engage, after his death, to do everything that we judge consistent with the cause of religion in America and the political interests of these States to preserve and promote our union with the Methodists in Europe."

This was a courteous recognition of Mr. Wesley; but, as will be seen, it had no practical value.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONFERENCES FROM 1785 TO 1789.

BEGINNING with the year 1785, the title of the Annual Minutes was changed. Before it read: "Minutes of Some Conversations Between the Preachers in Connection with the Reverend Mr. John Wesley. Begun at —— and ended at ——." Now the form became: "Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year ——."

This was the beginning of a formal recognition of distinct bodies called Annual Conferences; but the evolution was not yet complete. They were now separate bodies in one sense; but for law-making purposes all had to be taken together to make the governing unit.

In 1785 three Conferences were held,—the first at Green Hills, North Carolina, on the 20th of April; the next at Mr. Mason's, in Brunswick County, Virginia, on the first day of May; and the third in Baltimore, on the first day of June.[1]

Lee remarks: "This was the first time we had more than one regular Conference in the same year. For a few years before this we had two Conferences in the same year; but they were considered only as

[1] Lee's History of Methodists, 1810, p. 118.

one, first begun in one place and adjourned to another. Now there were three, and no adjournment." Continuing he says: "The business of the three Conferences was all arranged in the Minutes as if it had all been done at one time and place; and, for the first time, we had the Annual Minutes printed, which practice we have followed ever since."[1]

Lee also says: "This year and the two succeeding years the Minutes were called 'Minutes of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America.'"[2] The reprint of 1813 which is at hand does not give this form; but Mr. Lee may be correct, and probably is, for he wrote his "History of the Methodists in the United States of America" in 1809, and may have had in his possession the earliest impressions. If he is accurate in his statement, then in the reprint a change was made in the title; but the title he gives suggests a fact of much value; namely, that the members of all the Annual Conferences constituted the General Conference, and though they might not come together in one place, yet that agreed upon by each and all of the Annual Conferences was equivalent to the action of the General Conference when assembled in one place.

The Annual Minutes give names, figures, and decisions as though there was only one meeting. The Annual Conferences are becoming distinct in membership; but the law-making power belongs to all, and nothing can become a law unless adopted by every Annual Conference; and, when so adopted, it is

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 118. [2] *Ibid.*

equivalent to the action of all, meeting in one place in a consolidated General Conference.

Dr. Stevens says: "The Christmas Conference was the first General Conference; that is to say, all the Annual Conferences were supposed to be there assembled. It was, therefore, the supreme judicatory of the Church. It was not yet a delegated body, but the whole ministry in session. It made no provision for any future session of the kind; but for some years legislative enactments were made as heretofore, every new measure being submitted to each Annual Conference by the superintendents, and the majority of all being necessary to its validity. . . . Until the appointment of stated or regular General Conferences the Annual Conferences continued to be considered local or sectional meetings of the one undivided ministry, held in different localities, for the local convenience of its members,—every general or legislative measure being submitted, as we have seen, to all the sessions before it could become a law. . . . The Annual Conference was, therefore, still the supreme assembly of the Church, except when, by its appointment, a General Conference—that is to say, a collective assembly of the Annual Conference—should intervene."[1]

So Dr. Bangs observes: "It seems that heretofore there had been held only one regular Conference in a year; for, though some of the preachers had assembled in separate places, for the dispatch of their

[1] A. Stevens, History of Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 1865, Vol. II, pp. 219-221.

local affairs, the regular Conference was considered one and indivisible as to all matters of a general character. But as the work enlarged, new circuits formed, and additional laborers entered the field; and these scattered over such a large surface of country, it became inconvenient for all the preachers to assemble together in one place. Hence this year (1785) there were held three Conferences,—one at Green Hills in North Carolina, April 20th; another at Mr. Mason's, Brunswick County, Virginia, May 1st; and the other at Baltimore, on the first day of June. But though the business was transacted in three separate Conferences, their doings appeared in the Minutes as one, because nothing except the stationing of the preachers, was considered binding which was done in one Conference, unless approved by all the rest."[1]

Lee, referring to the printed Minutes of 1785, remarks that "the form of the Minutes of Conference was changed this year, and all the *elders* who were directed to take the oversight of several circuits were set to the right hand of a bracket, which inclosed all the circuits and preachers of which he was to take charge. This may be considered as the beginning of the presiding elder's office; although it was not known by that name at that time, yet, in the absence of a *superintendent*, this *elder* had the directing of all the preachers that were inclosed in the bracket against which his name was set."[2]

[1] Nathan Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 10th Ed., pp. 243, 244. This work was written in 1838.

[2] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, pp. 119, 120.

In the reprint of 1813 the name of the elder stands at the head of the list of appointments and preachers, and it was his duty to administer the sacraments within the bounds of the charges named. Brackets are used in this edition where there are more names connected with a circuit than can be placed in one line. In this arrangement is a foreshadowing of the presiding-eldership and also of the division of a Conference into districts over which the presiding elders would have supervision.

The Minutes for 1785 show only one action of a legislative character, namely:

"It is recommended to all our brethren to suspend the execution of the minute on slavery till the deliberations of a future Conference, and that an equal space of time be allowed all our members for consideration, when the minute shall be put in force.

"N. B.—We do hold in the deepest abhorrence the practice of slavery; and shall not cease to seek its destruction by all wise and prudent means."[1]

The edition of the Discipline printed in London in 1786 omits Question 23 on the use of "Spirituous Liquors," the Rule on Slavery, that on supplying vacancies on circuits, and that on the trial of preachers. These changes suggest the fact that in the early years following the reorganization of 1784 the Minutes of the Conferences do not record changes which were made in the Discipline. The proceedings have been lost and only the results retained, and now and then changes are made for which there is no evidence to prove that the Conferences were responsible.

[1] Methodist Conferences, 1773–1813, p. 55.

This year a second edition of the Sunday Service was printed in London. The title of the edition of 1784 was, as we have already learned, "The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America," while the edition of 1786 reads, "The Sunday Service of the Methodists in the United States of America," showing that North America was used by Wesley in the sense of the United States of America; and so in the title to the Form of Discipline made in 1784, "Methodist Episcopal Church in America" meant "The Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America."

The Minutes for 1786 do not show any action of a legislative character, but they mention the fact that Edward Dromgoole and William Glendenning, who have been frequently mentioned in the preceding pages had "desisted from traveling." The latter states that he "stopped traveling in the month of June, 1785."[1] Referring to this matter Lee says that "by some means he lost his reason."[2]

This is the man who, in 1784, Asbury declared "had been devising a plan" to lay Asbury aside, "or at least to abridge" his powers. At the Conference of that year, after Glendenning and any others who held his views had been silenced by the reading of Wesley's letter to which reference has been made,[3] Mr. Glendenning was sent to Brunswick in the southern part of Virginia. He thus gives his experience while in that locality: "My mind got more and more darkened, and I lost sight of my

[1] Autobiography of William Glendenning, Philadelphia, 1795, p. 16.
[2] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 122.
[3] Pages 210, 211, 212.

reconciled God, and all spiritual comforts departed from me."[1]

At the Christmas Conference he says: "They wanted me to go as a missionary to *Nova Scotia;* which I refused with warmth."[2] At the same Conference he was proposed for elder's orders, but was not elected. Referring to this he remarks: "I was rejected from the eldership. The reason assigned was, *that I wanted gifts.*" After this he says: "While Mr. Asbury was at prayer, I felt all light of divine mercy, as in a moment, take its flight from me. My soul then sunk into the depths of misery and despair."[3]

In 1792 he desired to be restored to Conference membership, but Lee remarks: "The Conference believed him to be beside himself at that time, and would not receive him."[4]

The Conference of 1787 is memorable in many respects. Wesley directed that a General Conference be held that year, as will be seen by the following letter addressed to Dr. Coke:

"LONDON, September 6, 1786.

"DEAR SIR,—I desire that you would appoint a General Conference of all our preachers in the United States to meet at Baltimore on May 1, 1787, and that Mr. Richard Whatcoat may be appointed superintendent with Mr. Francis Asbury. I am, dear sir, your affectionate friend and brother,

"JOHN WESLEY.

"To the REV. DR. COKE."

[1] Life of William Glendenning, Philadelphia, 1795, pp. 11, 12.
[2] *Id.*, p. 13. [3] *Id.*, p. 14.
[4] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810. pp. 122, 123.

Coke, in obedience to Wesley's desire, came to America to hold a General Conference; but it appears that there was no regularly called General Conference, though the session at Baltimore has been frequently so styled because it undertook to transact that which was really General Conference business.

Sherman, referring to the Baltimore Conference of 1787, says: "By some this has been incorrectly classed as a General Conference. That Wesley ordered one, and that Dr. Coke came over to hold it, is true; but the plan was . . warmly resisted by Asbury and his associates. . . . The Conference was simply annual, though much business was transacted, such as now pertains to the General Conference. But this does not prove it to have been a General Conference, as all such matters were then arranged in the Annual Conference of other years as well as this."[1]

Lee throws considerable light on the acts of the Baltimore session of 1787. From what he tells us, it is manifest that the Conference did not hesitate to criticise Dr. Coke. This shows how jealous the Conference was as to its rights. Whether Mr. Asbury sympathized with the move of the Conference is not clear. He was in the United States all the time while Dr. Coke was flitting here and there, managing affairs not only in the United States, but also rendering valuable service to Wesley by directing his work

[1] David Sherman, D. D., History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 3d Ed., 1890, p. 28.

in England and Ireland and in distant British possessions.

Lee relates that "at the Baltimore Conference the preachers complained of Dr. Coke because he had taken upon himself a right which they never gave him, of altering the time and place of holding our Conferences after it had been settled and fixed on at the previous Conference. Another complaint was brought against him for writing improper letters to some of our preachers, such as were calculated to stir up strife and contention among them. At that time the Doctor saw that the preachers were pretty generally united against him. He acknowledged his faults, begged pardon, and promised not to meddle with our affairs again when he was out of the United States. He then gave in writing a certificate to the same purpose, which is as follows:

"'THE CERTIFICATE OF DR. COKE TO THE CONFERENCE.

"'I do solemnly engage by this instrument that I never will, by virtue of my office as superintendent of the Methodist Church, during my absence from the United States of America, exercise any government whatever in the said Methodist Church during my absence from the United States. And I do also engage that I will exercise no privilege in the said Church when present in Conference, except that of ordaining according to the regulations and law already existing, or hereafter to be made, in the said Church; and that of presiding when present in Conference; and lastly that of traveling at large. Given under my hand the second day of May, in the year 1787. THOMAS COKE.

"'Witnesses:

"'JOHN TUNNIL,

"'JOHN HAGERTY,

"'NELSON REED.'

"The preachers then agreed to forgive what was past, provided this condition should be expressed in the Minutes, which was done thus:

"'*Ques.* Who are the superintendents of our Church for the United States?

"'*Ans.* Thomas Coke (when present in the States) and Francis Asbury.'"[1]

Thus was affirmed, first, the authority of the Conference over the superintendent; secondly, the principle that the superintendency was for the United States; and, thirdly, that when not in the United States, and being thus out of his jurisdiction, a superintendent could not exercise the functions of his office as to matters in the United States.

At the Conference of 1786 it was agreed that the next year Conferences would be held at Salisbury, North Carolina, May 17th; at Petersburg, Virginia, June 19th; and at Abingdon, Maryland, July 24th;[2] but several changes were made.

Lee says: "In 1787 we had three Conferences. The twentieth Conference was held at Salisbury, in North Carolina, on the 17th day of March; the twenty-first Conference was held at Rough Creek Church, in Virginia, on the 19th day of April; the twenty-second Conference was held at Baltimore, on the 1st day of May."[3]

These changes were made to accommodate Coke, and appear to have given rise to the above mentioned

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, pp. 124-126.
[2] Printed Minutes, 1773-1813, p. 61.
[3] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 124.

action. Coke thus comments on the trouble: "Conference began, when, behold, Satan exerted his utmost subtilty. Never, surely, was more external peace and liberty enjoyed by the Church of God, or any part of it, since the fall of man, than we enjoy in America; and everything seems to be falling before the power of the Word. What, then, remained for the infernal serpent but to sow the seeds of schism and division among ourselves? But glory be to God! yea, glory forever be ascribed to his sacred name! the devil was completely defeated. Our painful contests, I trust, have produced the most indissoluble union between my brethren and me. We thoroughly perceived the mutual purity of each other's intentions in respect to the points in dispute. We mutually yielded and mutually submitted, and the silken cords of love and affection were tied to the horns of the altar forever and ever."

The greatest difficulty, however, grew out of Mr. Wesley's attempt to direct the Conference in the selection of superintendents. Mr. Wesley evidently believed he had that right, and the organizing Convention or Conference of 1784 had by formal resolution agreed, "in matters belonging to Church government, to obey his commands." Now, however, when the test is reached, the Conference resents the assertion of authority on the part of the founder of Methodism.

One of those nominated at this time by Mr. Wesley was the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson; the other was the Rev. Richard Whatcoat. In 1785, Mr. Garrett-

son expected to be appointed to Charleston, South Carolina; but, as the Minutes show, he was sent to Shelburne,[1] which was in Nova Scotia. Garrettson, alluding to this, writes: "And, instead of Charleston, I had an appointment to take charge of the work in the East. I was tempted (if it was a temptation) to think that the nomination was partial; however, I was resolved, with the blessing of the Lord, to go, as long as my strength would admit, anywhere and everywhere, as might be thought best."[2]

Lee says: "In the month of April, this year (1787), Mr. Freeborn Garrettson left Nova Scotia, and returned to the United States; and from that time he has continued in his own native country. Mr. Wesley had given directions for Brother F. Garrettson to be ordained a superintendent for Nova Scotia; but when the business was taken under consideration, some of the preachers insisted that if he was ordained for that station, he should confine himself wholly to that place for which he was set apart, and not be at liberty to return again to this part of the country. Mr. Garrettson did not feel freedom to enter into an obligation of that kind, and chose rather to continue as he was, and therefore was not ordained."[3]

Mr. Garrettson, after recounting various incidents of his journey, remarks: "I then pursued my way to Baltimore, where many of the dear servants of God

[1] Minutes of Methodist Conferences, 1773–1813, p. 55.
[2] Autobiography of Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, 1791, p. 199.
[3] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, Baltimore, 1810, p. 128.

met in Conference. It was the desire of Mr. Wesley and others that I should be set apart for the superintendency of the work in Nova Scotia.—My mind was divided.—Man is a fallible creature.—In the end I concluded not to leave the States, for thousands in this country are dear to me. On the whole we had a blessed Conference, and my appointment was to preside in the Peninsula."[1]

As Mr. Lee's statement shows, the Conference of 1787 not only refused to let its own superintendent exercise power in the United States when he was out of the United States, but also refused to set apart a superintendent for a foreign field, unless he would remain in that field and limit his jurisdiction to that locality. They meant that one made a superintendent for a foreign jurisdiction should not have any such official power within the United States.

Lee also throws light upon the refusal of the Conference to elect Whatcoat to the superintendency at this time. He observes that "Mr. Wesley also directed that Richard Whatcoat should be ordained a joint superintendent with Mr. Asbury. When this business was brought before the Conference most of the preachers objected, and would not consent to it. The reasons against it were: 1. That he was not qualified to take the charge of the Connection. 2. That they were apprehensive that if Mr. Whatcoat was ordained, Mr. Wesley would likely recall Mr. Asbury, and he would return to England. Dr. Coke contended that we were obliged to receive Mr.

[1] Freeborn Garrettson's Autobiography, 1791, p. 220.

Whatcoat, because we had said in the Minutes, taken at the Christmas Conference, when we were first formed into a Church in 1784, 'During the life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the gospel, ready in matters belonging to Church government to obey his commands.' Many of the members of that Conference argued that they were not at the Conference when that engagement was entered into, and they did not consider themselves bound by it. Other preachers, who had said they were 'ready to obey his commands,' said they did not feel ready *now* to obey his command. The preachers at last agreed to depart from that engagement, which some of the elder brethren had formally entered into, and in the next printed Minutes that engagement was left out.

"They had made the engagement of their own accord, and among themselves; and they believed they had a right to depart therefrom when they pleased, seeing it was not a contract made with Mr. Wesley or any other person, but an agreement among themselves. It was further argued that Mr. Wesley, while in England, could not tell what man was qualified to govern us as well as we could who were present and were to be governed. We believed also that, if Mr. Wesley was here himself, he would be of the same opinion with us.

"We then wrote a long and loving letter to Mr. Wesley, and requested him to come over to America and visit his spiritual children.

"This step of receding from the above engage-

ment was afterwards considered by some disaffected persons as improper. If there was anything improper in the business, it was in entering into the engagement, and not in departing from it."[1]

The Rev. Mr. Garrettson gives it as his opinion, that "the fear arising in the minds of many of the members of the Conference lest Mr. Wesley should recall Mr. Asbury, was the cause of R. Whatcoat's appointment being rejected."[2]

The Rev. Thomas Ware, who was at the Conference, gives us a narration which corresponds with the statements of Lee and other contemporaries. He says:

"In the spring of 1787 Dr. Coke visited us again, and called the preachers to meet in Conference at Baltimore on the 1st day of May. The liberty he took in changing the time and place of holding the Conference gave serious offense to many of the preachers. But this was not all nor even the chief matter which caused some trouble at this Conference. Mr. Wesley had appointed Mr. Whatcoat a superintendent, and instructed Dr. Coke to introduce a usage among us, to which, I may safely say, there was not one of the preachers inclined to submit, much as they loved and honored him. Mr. Wesley had been in the habit of calling his preachers together, not to legislate, but to confer. Many of them he found to be excellent counselors, and he heard them respectfully on the weighty matters

[1] Jesse Lee, Hist. of the Methodists, Baltimore, 1810, pp. 126, 127.
[2] Rev. Freeborn Garrettson's Semi-centennial Sermon, p. 20.

which were brought before them; but the right to *decide* all questions he reserved to himself. This he deemed the more excellent way; and, as we had volunteered and pledged ourselves to obey, he instructed the Doctor, conformably to his own usage, to put as few questions to vote as possible, saying: 'If you, Brother Asbury and Brother Whatcoat, are agreed, it is enough.' To place the power of deciding all questions discussed, or nearly all, in the hands of the superintendents, was what could never be introduced among us—a fact which we thought Mr. Wesley could not but have known, had he known us as well as we ought to have been known by Dr. Coke. After all, we had none to blame as much as ourselves. In the first effusion of our zeal we had adopted a rule binding ourselves to obey Mr. Wesley; and this rule must be rescinded, or we must be content not only to receive Mr. Whatcoat as one of our superintendents, but also—as our brethren of the British Conference—with barely discussing subjects, and leaving the decision of them to two or three individuals. This was the chief cause of our rescinding the rule. All, however, did not vote to rescind it; some thought it would be time enough to do so when our superintendents should claim to decide questions independently of the Conference, which it was confidently believed they never would do.

"We were under many and great obligations to Mr. Wesley, and also to Dr. Coke, who had done much to serve us, and all at their own expense. As

to Mr. Wesley, there were none of us disposed to accuse him of a desire to tyrannize over us, and, in consequence, to withdraw our love and confidence from him; but there was, perhaps, with some, a lack of cautiousness not to cause grief to such a father. There were also suspicions entertained by some of the preachers, and perhaps by Mr. Asbury himself, that if Mr. Whatcoat were received as a superintendent, Mr. Asbury would be recalled. For this none of us were prepared."[1]

The Rev. William Phœbus, who also was a member of the Conference of 1787, states that Dr. Coke had "some directions from Mr. Wesley to give the Conference, in which directions Richard Whatcoat was nominated for a third superintendent. One ventured to say that Mr. Wesley took too much on him—yea, too much to be borne with by Americans; that he might increase his impositions if his power were not checked; it might grow enormous, even to popery."[2]

Asbury appears to have been opposed to the resolution of submission from the beginning. In a letter to the Rev. Joseph Benson he remarks: "After the Revolution we were called upon to give a printed obligation, which here follows, and could not be dispensed with—it must be." Again he says: "I never approved of that binding minute. I did not think it practical expediency to obey Mr. Wesley at

[1] Rev. Thomas Ware's Autobiography, New York, 1840, pp. 129-131.

[2] Memoirs of the Rev. Richard Whatcoat, Late Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, by Rev. Wm. Phœbus, M. D., New York, 1828.

three thousand miles distance in all matters relative to Church government."[1]

Referring to Mr. Wesley's assertion of authority, Asbury states: "He rigidly contended for a special and independent right of governing the chief minister or ministers of our order, which, in our judgment, meant not only to put him out of office, but to remove him from the continent to elsewhere that our father saw fit; and that notwithstanding our constitution and the right of electing every Church officer, and more especially our superintendent. We were told 'not till after the death of Mr. Wesley' could our constitution have its full operation."[2]

In England it was not until the decease of Mr. Wesley that the Deed of Declaration made the British Conference a self-governing body, and it seems that some one tried to show that the same principle applied to the reorganized body in America, but the cases were widely different. Under the Deed of Declaration property rights were involved, and the Conference could only come into control upon the death of Mr. Wesley, who enjoyed the right as long as he lived. The Deed of Declaration conveyed powers to the Conference which under law vested in John Wesley during his life-time. With the American Methodists the case was different and the circumstances were different. Mr. Wesley did not convey to them in a legal document rights which inhered in

[1] Asbury's Letter to the Rev. Joseph Benson.

[2] Asbury's Letter to the Rev. Joseph Benson; See Centennial History of American Methodism, by Rev. John Atkinson, D. D., New York, 1884, p. 57.

him. They were in another land and under other laws, and under the liberty of the United States they formed themselves into a Church. The cases were not parallel.

The part Asbury had in this matter has been the subject of considerable controversy. It is said that he at first acquiesced in Wesley's plan to have Whatcoat made a superintendent, and that the first Conference of the year did likewise. "When the matter was brought before the Virginia Conference it was strongly opposed by James O'Kelly. This opposition surprised and pained Dr. Coke. It was agreed, however, to submit the case for final decision to the Conference soon to be held in Baltimore, 'on condition that the Virginia Conference might send a deputy to explain their sentiments.'[1] At the Baltimore Conference the bishops called the elders into council to consider it, and they, notwithstanding Coke's advocacy, decided adversely."[2]

James O'Kelly, some years after the agreement to obey Wesley had been stricken out, charged that Mr. Asbury was the chief agent in the transaction. In his "Apology" O'Kelly said: "After these things Francis took with him a few chosen men, and in a clandestine manner expelled John, whose surname was Wesley, from the Methodist Episcopal Church."

To this the Rev. Nicholas Snethen published a

[1] Rev. Nicholas Snethen's Reply to Mr. O'Kelly's Apology for Protesting against the Methodist Episcopal Church Government, Philadelphia, 1800.

[2] Rev. John Atkinson, D. D., Centennial History of American Methodism, New York, 1884, p. 58.

"Reply," in which he said: "At a Conference held in Baltimore, May 1, 1787, a vote was taken that Richard Whatcoat should not be ordained superintendent, and that Mr. Wesley's name should for the future be left off the American Minutes. Mr. Asbury neither made the motion nor advocated it; the whole case was constitutionally carried through the Conference, and voted by a fair majority."[1]

In regard to this Mr. Asbury himself has said: "At the first General Conference I was mute and modest when it passed, and I was mute when it was expunged."

On the other side the Atlantic, Thomas Rankin, his old colleague, charged the act on Asbury. Mr. Snethen, who traveled with Asbury as early as 1800, says: "Mr. Asbury considered Mr. Rankin in the light of an opponent, and it is certain that if there was any dependence to be placed in the correspondence of his English friend, Mr. Rankin did use all his influence with Mr. Wesley to have him recalled. Mr. Asbury was informed that when the news arrived that Mr. Wesley's name was left off the American Minutes, Mr. Rankin, who was present, without waiting for the evidence, exclaimed, 'That's Frank Asbury's doings.'"[2]

In a letter to the Rev. Joseph Benson, Mr. Asbury affirms that "the counsel of Diotrephes [undoubtedly Rankin], in a full Conference, was in substance this:

[1] Snethen's Reply to Mr. O'Kelly's Apology for Protesting against the Methodist Episcopal Church Government, Philadelphia, 1800.

[2] Rev. Nicholas Snethen's Methodist History, in the Wesleyan Repository.

'If he had the power and authority of Mr. Wesley he would call Frank Asbury home directly.' John Harper was the man who was present in Conference and heard this advice given, and told me several years after in America with his own mouth." It seems very evident that there was involved not only the question as to Wesley's power to nominate a new superintendent, but also his power to depose one already in the office

The Rev. Thomas Morrell, who was "admitted on trial" at the Conference of 1787, has given an account of the affair in a pamphlet, entitled "Truth Discovered," in which he says:

"Early in 1787, Mr. Wesley intimated a design of removing Mr. Asbury from America to Europe, and of sending us a superintendent of his own nomination. When the Conference assembled, some of the eldest and most sensible of the elders observed that Mr. Wesley had no authority to remove Mr. Asbury, much less could he *impose* a superintendent on us without our choice; for it was written in our Constitution that 'no person should be ordained a superintendent over us without the consent of the majority of the Conference;' that no such consent had been given; that though they highly venerated Mr. Wesley, and were willing to receive his advice, and preserve and promote our union with him and our Methodist brethren in Europe, as far as the political interest of our country would authorize us,—yet they could not give up their rights to any man on earth. And after a number of arguments to show the impro-

priety and impolicy of any man having the power to exercise such an uncontrollable and unlimited authority over us as Mr. Wesley wished to do, and to prevent him from exercising this power in the present case by virtue of his name standing at the head of the Minutes, they moved that it should be struck off. The vote was carried, and his name was omitted. Mr. Wesley complained that we were ungrateful. We felt ourselves grieved that the good old man was hurt, and determined to give him every satisfaction in our power consistent with our rights; and in 1789 the Conference consented that his name should be restored on the Minutes, in testimony of our union with and respect for him, but inserted in such a manner as to preclude him from exercising an unconstitutional power over us."[1]

Wesley felt aggrieved. Asbury says that Mr. Wesley was told "that no sooner had he granted the Americans what they wished than they declared themselves independent of him."[2]

Wesley blamed Asbury, and thus wrote to Whatcoat: "It was not well judged of Brother Asbury to *suffer*, much less indirectly encourage, the foolish step in the last Conference. Every preacher present ought, both in duty and in prudence, to have said: 'Brother Asbury, Mr. Wesley is your father, consequently ours.' Candor will affirm this in the face of the world. It is highly probable that disallowing me

[1] Rev. John Atkinson, D. D., Centennial History of American Methodism, New York, 1884, pp. 61, 62.

[2] Asbury's Letter to Rev. Joseph Benson.

will, as soon as my head is laid, occasion a total breach between the English and American Methodists. They will naturally say: 'If they can do without us, we can do without them.' But they would find a greater difference than they imagine. Next would follow a separation among themselves."[1]

Again, in a letter, dated October 31, 1789,[2] Wesley said: "I was a little surprised when I received some letters from Mr. Asbury, affirming that no person in Europe knew how to direct those in America. Soon after, he flatly refused to receive Mr. Whatcoat in the character I sent him. He told George Shadford: 'Mr. Wesley and I are like Cæsar and Pompey—he will bear no equal, and I will bear no superior.'[3] And accordingly he quietly sat by until his friends voted my name out of the American Minutes. This completed the matter, and showed that he had no connection with me."

To these charges Mr. Asbury thus replied: "And why was I thus charged? Because I did not establish Mr. Wesley's absolute authority over the American Connection. For myself, this I had submitted to; but the Americans were too jealous to bind themselves to yield to him in all things relative to Church government. Mr. Wesley was a man they had never seen—was three thousand miles off; how might submission in such a case be expected? Brother Coke

[1] Memoirs of Bishop Whatcoat, by Wm. Phœbus, M. D., New York, 1828.

[2] Published by Rev. Wm. Hammett, in Charleston, South Carolina.

[3] It is supposed that Wesley was mistaken in attributing this language to Asbury.

and myself gave offense to the Connection by enforcing Mr. Wesley's will in some matters."

Asbury admits that he was mute when the agreement was expunged from the Minutes; or, to speak more accurately, from the Discipline. Whether he took an active part in the movement has, to-day, little practical value. For him to be mute under such circumstances was to give encouragement to those who were opposed to Wesley's supremacy.

If Asbury had been openly opposed, it would have been simply to have voiced his convictions. After the agreement of 1784, it might have been necessary for him to have explained his action to Mr. Wesley; but posterity would not demand any apology.

Asbury was right when he maintained that a man residing beyond an ocean three thousand miles wide could not direct American Methodism. Whatever may have been his motive, even if it was to make himself more independent, the action needs no apology, but was productive of great good.

It was absurd to suppose that even a Wesley could, under such conditions, direct a growing Church in a remote Republic. The young Church was competent to care for itself, and would not brook foreign interference, no matter by whom exerted.

To state the matter in brief, the vital question was whether Mr. Wesley should have power to control in American affairs. The Conference settled it by refusing to set apart for the superintendency the persons he had named, and by striking out the paragraph in

which the Christmas Conference had agreed to obey his commands. The Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America had decided that it would govern the Church, and that neither Mr. Wesley nor any other individual at home or abroad should rule either the Conference or the Church represented by the Conference. The action was an ecclesiastical Declaration of Independence.

However, there was not universal satisfaction in America; for the reverence for Mr. Wesley was very great. Dr. Phœbus tells us: "This was a time of trial with many, who laid it to heart. It was feared that part would continue a society, or form again under Mr. Wesley, independent of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Many felt like being scattered, when the shepherd had received so many blows from his friends."[1]

Mr. Snethen says the removal of Wesley's name from the Minutes, as it was commonly termed, "gave rise to feelings of a very unpleasant nature. Dr. Coke actually commenced the complaint in the pulpit, and was only restrained by the timely and resolute interference of some of the more judicious of the preachers."

Nevertheless, it was right that the Church should be independent. The main criticism that can be made upon the affair is, that while the agreement to obey ought to have been annulled, some way should have been found to give Mr. Wesley's name an

[1] William Phœbus, M. D., Memoirs of Bishop Richard Whatcoat, New York, 1828, p. 67.

honorable place as the founder of the Methodists. Possibly the matter might have been managed more pleasantly; but the assertion of independence resulted in increased prosperity to the Church, and certainly gave it a right ecclesiastical status. The Conference is now supreme in form as well as in fact.

In 1787 "Mr. Asbury reprinted the 'General Minutes,' but in a different form from what they were before."[1] By the "General Minutes" Lee meant what we now understand by the "Discipline" of the Church. The first edition issued after the Christmas Conference was entitled, "Minutes of Several Conversations," etc., "Composing a Form of Discipline," etc. The edition of 1787 had this title: "A Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America," etc., "Arranged under Proper Heads, and Methodized in a More Acceptable and Easy Manner."

In this "Discipline" for the first time appears the title "bishop" as applied to a superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Lee says:

"The third question in the second section, and the answer, read thus:

"'*Ques.* Is there any other business to be done in Conference?

"'*Ans.* The electing and ordaining of bishops, elders, and deacons.'

"This was the first time that our superintendents ever gave themselves the title of bishops in the

[1] Lee's History of Methodists, 1810, p. 127.

Minutes. They changed the title themselves, without the consent of the Conference; and at the next Conference they asked the preachers if the word *bishop* might stand in the Minutes—seeing that it was a Scripture name, and the meaning of the word *bishop* was the same with that of *superintendent*.

"Some of the preachers opposed the alteration, and wished to retain the former title; but a majority of the preachers agreed to let the word *bishop* remain; and in the Annual Minutes for the next year the first question is, 'Who are the bishops of our Church for the United States?'

"In the third section of this Form of Discipline, and in the sixth page, it is said: 'We have constituted ourselves into an *Episcopal Church* under the direction of *bishops, elders, deacons*, and *preachers*, according to the form of ordination annexed to our prayer-book, and the regulations laid down in this Form of Discipline.' From that time the name of bishop has been in common use among us, both in conversation and in writing."[1]

As the Minutes for 1787 retain the title superintendent and do not use the word bishop, we must infer that the new Discipline was issued after the adjournment of the Conference of that year, and that "the next Conference" that allowed the new title to stand was the Conference of the following year. We must also infer that the word bishop, which appears in the reprint of the Annual Minutes for 1785, was inserted after the Discipline of 1787 had been

[1] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, Baltimore, 1810, pp. 128, 129.

issued.[1] The part to which we refer reads as follows: "We thought it best to become an Episcopal Church, making the episcopal office elective and the elected superintendent or bishop amenable to the body of ministers and preachers."[2] Then there was the following foot-note: "As the translators of our version of the Bible have used the English word bishop instead of superintendent, it has been thought by us that it would appear more Scriptural to adopt their term bishop."[3]

From that time superintendent and bishop have been used as synonyms in the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. A bishop is one who oversees, and a superintendent is an overseer, so that the words have practically the same meaning. At the same time the retention of the word superintendent tends to prevent erroneous ideas as to the nature of the episcopal office, for though the word ordination is used somewhat uncertainly by a few of the old writers, the Methodist Episcopal Church has always stood on the foundation laid by Mr. Wesley, that "bishops and presbyters are the same order," and that the distinction between a bishop and an ordinary presbyter is one of office and not of order.[4]

---

[1] For fuller treatment of this subject see Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism, by T. B. Neely, D. D., New York, 1888, pp. 316, 317, 337–343.

[2] Minutes of Conferences, 1773–1813, p. 51. [3] *Id.*, 50.

[4] See resolution reaffirming the doctrine, Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1884, p. 207; Prefatory Note to Consecration of Bishops in Discipline; Neely's Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism.

There is not much in the year 1788 that bears directly upon our theme, but we should quote the remark of Lee, that "when the Minutes of this year were printed, the condition of Dr. Coke's being a bishop 'when in the United States,' was left out, and the question was changed, and was entered thus: "*Q.* Who are the bishops of our Church for the United States?" "*A.* Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury."[1] But there is no doubt the restriction remained in force, though the words were not carried forward in the Minutes.

In 1785 and 1786 the question in the Minutes was, "Who are the superintendents of our Church?" and the answer was, "Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury;" but in 1787, when the question of Dr. Coke's jurisdiction when not in the United States was decided, the question was changed so that it read: "Who are the superintendents of our Church for the United States?" and the answer was, "Thomas Coke (when present in the States), and Francis Asbury;" and now, in 1788, though the qualifying clause in regard to Bishop Coke is omitted, and the word bishops is substituted for superintendents, the limitation to the United States is retained in the form of the question: "Who are the bishops of our Church for the United States?"[2] They were bishops for the United States, and the implication is that they were to exert episcopal functions only in and when in the United States.

[1] Jesse Lee; History of the Methodists, Baltimore, 1810, p. 136.
[2] Minutes of Conferences, 1773-1813, p. 69.

In 1789 there were eleven Conferences,[1] and fourteen were appointed for the following year.

Referring to the Conferences of 1789, Lee remarks that "several of these Conferences were within thirty or forty miles of each other, which was pretty generally disliked; but at that time the bishop had the right of appointing as many Conferences as he thought proper, and at such times and places as he judged best; but since then the General Conference fixes the number of Annual Conferences to be held in each year, having appointed the bounds of each of them."[2]

In the Conferences of 1789 an effort was made to show that the Church did not intend any disrespect to the Rev. John Wesley, when the Baltimore Conference of 1787 struck out of the Discipline the agreement to obey his commands in matters ecclesiastical. The Conferences did not restore the annulled act, but they went as far as they could to show their regard for the father of Methodism. Lee relates that, "As some persons had complained of our receding from a former engagement made by some of our preachers, that 'during the life of Mr. Wesley, in matters belonging to Church government, they would obey his commands,' and as others had thought that we did not pay as much respect to Mr. Wesley as we ought, the bishops introduced a question in the Annual Minutes, which was as follows:

[1] Lee's History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 140; Minutes of Conferences, 1773–1813, p. 76.

[2] Rev. Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 140.

"'*Ques.* Who are the persons that exercise the episcopal office in the Methodist Church in Europe and America?

"'*Ans.* John Wesley, Thomas Coke, and Francis Asbury, by regular order and succession.'

"The next question was asked differently from what it had ever been in any of the former Minutes, which stands thus:

"'*Ques.* Who had been elected by the unanimous suffrages of the General Conference to superintend the Methodist Connection in America?

"'*Ans.* Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury.'"[1]

So they recognized John Wesley as the head of Methodism, not only in Europe but also in America, and also recognized him as exercising the episcopal office. Wesley himself said in 1785, a few days after he had ordained ministers for Scotland; "I firmly believe I am a Scriptural ἐπίσκοπος,[2] as much as any man in England, or in Europe;"[3] yet he called himself a presbyter, and never had any higher ordination than that of an elder. He was an overseer of the Church, and so the Minutes of 1789 recognized him as in the episcopal office, and as performing episcopal functions; but the Conferences took care in the next question to specify that Bishops Coke and Asbury were to superintend in America.

Lee says, as we have seen, that the first answer contained the words, "by regular order and succession;" but they do not appear in the Minutes as reprinted in 1813, either for 1789 or any other year.

[1] Rev. Jesse Lee, Hist. of the Methodists, Baltimore, 1810, p. 142.

[2] Episcopus, a bishop.

[3] Letter of John Wesley to his brother Charles, Methodist Magazine, 1786, p. 50.

Lee states also that the bishops introduced the questions into the Annual Minutes. Probably they did prepare the Minutes for publication; but, according to Bishop Coke, the subject had been passed upon by the several Conferences prior to the insertion in the Minutes. In his journal he says:

"On the 9th of March we began our Conference in Georgia. Here we agreed (as we have ever since in each of the Conferences) that Mr. Wesley's name should be inserted at the head of our Small Annual Minutes and also in the Form of Discipline,—in Small Minutes, as the fountain of our episcopal office; and in the Form of Discipline, as the father of the whole work, under the divine guidance. To this all the Conferences have cheerfully and unanimously agreed."

It may be, however, that the Conferences did not pass upon the exact phraseology, but that the bishops, acting as editors, were governed by their own taste in the phrasing.[1] Wesley's name in this new relation appeared in the Annual Minutes only in the years 1789 and 1790; for, before the Minutes of 1791 were issued, he had departed this life after a most extraordinary career of goodness, usefulness, and the highest success; and had left behind him an influence which, instead of diminishing in power, seems to be steadily increasing, until to-day over twenty-five millions of people who call themselves Methodists revere his memory and perpetuate his principles.

[1] See Evolution of Episcopacy and Organic Methodism, by T. B. Neely, D. D., pp. 345-355.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNCIL.

SINCE the General Conference or organizing Convention of 1784, there had been no single gathering which included or represented all the preachers. Even the so-called General Conference of 1787 at Baltimore was not a regularly called General Conference and did not include all the preachers, though it transacted business that properly belonged to a General Conference or to the whole "body of ministers and preachers."[1]

With the exception of what was done at Baltimore alone in 1787, the legislative enactments had passed from Conference to Conference and only that which was agreed to by all the Conferences in any given year became a law.

This passing of measures around the Conferences was by some deemed an awkward and uncertain method. This fact, and the alleged inconvenience of assembling all the preachers in one place to hold a General Conference, were used as arguments for some new arrangement to facilitate the work of legislation.

So Bangs says: "In consequence of the extension of the work on every hand, spreading over such a large territory, there were two difficultics which

[1] Minutes of Conferences, 1773-1813, p. 61.

arose in the way of proceeding in the manner they had done heretofore.

"1. It was very inconvenient for all the members of the Conference to assemble together in one place to transact their business. Hence, as we have already seen, the bishops had appointed several separate Conferences for the dispatch of their ordinary affairs.

"2. But anything which was done in these separate Conferences was not binding—except simply the ordinations and stationing the preachers—unless sanctioned by them all. And as this could rarely be expected, constituted as human nature is, it was plainly seen that there was danger of their falling to pieces, or of having divers administrations.

"To provide against this evil, and to remedy the inconvenience above mentioned, it was determined this year, as the best thing that could be devised, to have a Council."[1]

The proposition for a body to be called "The Council" was presented in 1789. Lee tells us that "at these Conferences in 1789, a plan was laid for the holding [of] a *Council*. The bishops said they had made it a matter of prayer, and they believed the present plan was the best they could think of."[2]

Asbury doubtless was the inventor of this new plan. In his journal of Friday, February 20, 1789, he says: "I was closely employed in making my

[1] Nathan Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 1857, 10th Ed., Vol. I, p. 302.

[2] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 149.

plan, and arranging the papers for Conference."[1] Very likely the plan for the Council was included in the papers he was arranging.

Evidently the plan did not emanate from the preachers. From Lee's statement it is plain that it was an episcopal suggestion. Indeed when it was presented it met with objection on the part of the ministers.

Lee relates that "after some opposition had been made to the plan, and there had been some debating about it, a majority of the preachers agreed to the following plan, which was published in the Annual Minutes."[2] Asbury, referring to the Conference in North Carolina that year, writes: "We had weighty matters for consideration before us."[3] Quite likely this proposition for a Council was in his judgment one of the weighty matters.

Lee states that the plan was published in the Annual Minutes; but it does not appear in the reprint published in 1813.

The plan for the Council was printed in the following form:

"*Ques.* Whereas the holding of General Conferences on this extensive continent would be attended with a variety of difficulties and many inconveniences to the work of God, and whereas we judge it expedient that a Council should be formed of chosen men out of the several districts as representatives of the whole connection, to meet at stated times; in what manner is this Council to be formed, what shall be its powers, and what farther regulations shall be made concerning it?

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol II, p. 344.
[2] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 149.
[3] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. II, p. 46.

"*Ans.* 1. Our bishops and presiding elders shall be the members of this Council; provided, that the members who form the Council be never fewer than nine. And if any unavoidable circumstance prevent the attendance of a presiding elder at the Council, he shall have authority to send another elder out of his own district to represent him; but the elder so sent by the absenting presiding elder shall have no seat in the Council without the approbation of the bishop, or bishops, and presiding elders present. And if, after the above-mentioned provisions are complied with, any unavoidable circumstance or any contingencies reduce the number to less than nine, the bishop shall immediately summon such elders as do not preside, to complete the number.

"2. These shall have authority to mature everything they shall judge expedient.

"(1) To preserve the general union. (2) To render and preserve the external form of worship similar in all our societies through the continent. (3) To preserve the essentials of the Methodist doctrines and discipline pure and uncorrupted. (4) To correct all abuses and disorders; and, lastly, they are authorized to mature everything they may see necessary for the good of the Church, and for the promoting and improving our colleges and plan of education.

"3. Provided, nevertheless, that nothing shall be received as the resolution of the Council, unless it be assented to unanimously by the Council; and nothing so assented to by the Council shall be binding in any district till it has been agreed upon by a majority of the Conference which is held for that district.

"4. The bishops shall have authority to summon the Council to meet at such times and places as they shall judge expedient.

"5. The first Council shall be held at Cokesbury, on the first day of next December."

Such was the provision, which it was promised would accomplish great good.

The first meeting of the Council, though originally ordered for Cokesbury, was held at Baltimore, in the

month of December, 1789. Of that session, Asbury makes the following mention in his journal:

"Thursday, December 4. Our Council was seated, consisting of the following persons, viz.: Richard Ivey, from Georgia; R. Ellis, South Carolina; E. Morris, North Carolina; Phil. Bruce, North District of Virginia; James O'Kelly, South District of Virginia; L. Green, Ohio; Nelson Reid, Western Shore of Maryland; J. Everett, Eastern Shore; John Dickins, Pennsylvania; J. O. Cromwell, Jersey; and Freeborn Garrettson, New York. All our business was done in love and unanimity. The concerns of the college were well attended to, as also the printing business. We formed some resolutions relative to economy and union, and others concerning the funds for the relief of our suffering preachers on the frontiers. We rose on the eve of Wednesday following. During our sitting we had preaching every night; some few souls were stirred up, and others converted. The prudence of some had stilled the noisy ardor of our young people, and it was difficult to rekindle the fire. I collected about £28 for the poor, suffering preachers in the West. We spent one day in speaking our own experiences, and giving an account of the progress and state of the work of God in our several districts. A spirit of union pervaded the whole body, producing blessed effects and fruits."[1]

Sherman states that "the Council met at Baltimore, December 1, 1789, and framed a constitution, giving to that body powers similar to those of the General Conference."[2] As Sherman remarks, "The plan appears to have been warmly cherished by Asbury," yet it was exceedingly faulty.

Thus Bangs, adopting Lee's suggestion, points to one provision in this plan "which went to nullify their proceedings, and frustrate the very design for

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. II, p. 59.

[2] David Sherman, D. D., History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 3d Ed., 1890, p. 297.

which the Council was constituted. It was in these words: 'Nothing unanimously assented to by the Council shall be binding in any district till it has been agreed upon by a majority of the Conference which is held for that district.' Such a regulation, every one must perceive, tended to a dissolution of the body by introducing dissensions; for it could not be expected that so many independent bodies, acting separately, should entirely agree in many important particulars."[1]

This device was a dangerous centralization of power. The Council was composed of the bishops and the presiding elders, who were appointed by the bishops; so that the bishops really made the Council. It was a partial abandonment of the principle of self-government by the ministers in the Conferences, and the placing of it in the hands of the bishops. It was practically a change from Conference government, and a retracing of steps toward personal government, from which the Conference had broken away; and Asbury, the very man who had objected to the continued personal government of Wesley, had brought about that which was practically a personal government of his own. He may not have seen it in that light, but that is what it amounted to; for, as Sherman states, the plan placed "the legislative powers in the hands of one man and his aids and appointees."[2]

[1] Nathan Bangs, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, Vol. I, 10th Ed., 1857, p. 305.

[2] David Sherman, History of the Discipline, New York, 3d Ed., 1890. p. 297.

That the ministers in the Conferences consented to try this scheme to make government easy, demonstrates the great personal influence of Asbury; but even wise men sometimes make mistakes.

The plan was a partial reversion from Conference government to personal government. This was soon recognized, and protests came in from every side. It tended to undo what had been done. It was a retrograde movement, which soon stirred up such a feeling that it had to be abandoned.

Complaints began to arise against Asbury's power. Only a few weeks after the adjournment of the first Council, Asbury, while in Virginia, makes, under date of January 12, 1790, the following entry:

"From Mabry's we came to Brunswick quarterly meeting, where there was a considerable quickening and manifestation of the Lord's power. We had a good meeting at Roanoke Chapel; I rejoice that the society had increased to more than one hundred souls.

"I received a letter from the presiding elder of this district, James O'Kelly. He makes heavy complaints of my power, and bids me stop for one year, or he must use his influence against me. Power! power!—there is not a vote given in a Conference in which the presiding elder has not greatly the advantage of me. All the influence I am to gain over a company of young men in a district must be done in three weeks; the greater part of them, perhaps, are seen by me only at Conference, whilst the presiding elder has had them with him all the year, and has the greatest opportunity of gaining influence. This advantage may be abused—let the bishops look to it; but who has the power to lay an embargo on me, and to make of none effect the decision of all the Conferences of the Union?"[1]

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. II, p. 62.

The Council became a topic for discussion in the Conferences of 1790. Thus, under date of Monday, February 15, 1790, Asbury, referring to the Conference at Charleston, South Carolina, makes the following entry: "Our Conference began; our business was conducted in great peace and love. The business of the Council came before us, and it was determined that the concerns of the college and the printing should be left with the Council to act decisively upon; but that no new canons should be made, nor the old altered, without the consent of the Conference, and that whatever was done on this head should come in the shape of advice only."[1]

This indicates that some modification was made in the methods of the Council. Referring to a Conference held in North Carolina in June 1790, Bishop Asbury says, under date of June 1st: "Our business was much matured, the critical concern of the Council understood, and the plan, with its amendments, adopted."[2] At the Conference in Virginia the project did not move so smoothly. Under date of June 16, 1790, Bishop Asbury remarks: "Our Conference began; all was peace until the Council was mentioned. The young men appear to be entirely under the influence of the elders, and turned it out of doors. I was weary and felt but little freedom to speak on the subject. The business is to be explained to every preacher; and then it must be carried through the Conferences twenty-four times; *i. e.*, through all the Conferences for two years."[3]

---

[1] Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. II, p. 65. [2] *Id.* p. 76. [3] *Ibid.*

On the 26th of August, 1790, he writes: "To conciliate the minds of our brethren in the South District of Virginia, who are restless about the Council, I wrote their leader informing him 'that I would take my seat in Council as another member,' and in that point, at least, waive the claims of episcopacy; yea, I would lie down and be trodden upon, rather than knowingly injure one soul." [1]

September 14th, he says: "Set out, and next day reached Duck Creek Cross-roads, where we held our Conference for the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Delaware. One or two of our brethren felt the Virginia fire about the question of the Council, but all things came into order, and the Council obtained." [2]

On the 28th of the same month a Conference was held at Burlington, New Jersey. Referring to it Bishop Asbury remarks: "The session has been in great peace; harmony has prevailed, and the Council has been unanimously adopted." [3]

The second session of the Council was held December 1, 1790. Of this Bishop Asbury makes this record: "The Council was seated in Philip Rogers's chamber in Baltimore. After some explanation, we all agreed that we had a right to manage the temporal concerns of the Church and college decisively; and to recommend to the Conferences, for ratification, whatever we judged might be advantageous to the spiritual well-being of the whole body. For the sake of union, we declined sending out any recom-

[1] Bishop Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. II, p. 82. [2] *Id.*, p. 83.
[3] *Id.*, p. 84.

mendatory propositions: we had great peace and union in all our laborers. What we have done the Minutes will show."[1]

On Thursday, the 9th, he writes: "The Council arose after advising a loan of £1,000 payable in two years, for Cokesbury [College]; and giving directions for proper books to be printed."[2]

This was the second and last session of the Council. Another session was appointed for 1791, but the dissatisfaction was so great that it never convened.

The Rev. Jesse Lee has preserved for us a very full account of what was done at the two meetings of the Council. As the Minutes do not appear to be accessible, the portion preserved by him has great value while his comments furnish very interesting reading.

That we may have the whole matter as it appeared to a contemporary we quote just as he gives it in his history. He says:

"This plan for having a Council was entirely new, and exceedingly dangerous. A majority of the preachers voted in favor of it, but they were soon sensible that the plan would not answer the purpose for which it was intended. The Council was to be composed of the bishops and the presiding elders. The presiding elders were appointed, changed, and put out of office by the bishop, and just when he pleased; of course, the whole of the Council were to consist of the bishops and a few other men of their own choice or appointing.

"One dangerous clause in the plan was this:

"Nothing unanimously assented to by the Council shall be binding in any district till it has been agreed upon by a majority of the Conference which is held for that district. If, then, one district should agree to any important point, and

[1] Bishop Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. II, p. 88. [2] *Id.*, p. 89.

another district should reject it, the union between the two districts would be broken, and in process of time our *United Societies* would be thrown into disorder and confusion. This I saw clearly when the plan was first proposed, and to which I then objected.

"In the latter part of this year, the Council met according to appointment, but not at the place where they were to meet. The Annual Minutes said they should meet at *Cokesbury*. But they met in Baltimore.

"I will here transcribe the whole of the Minutes of the Council.

"'The *Proceedings* of the *Bishop* and *Presiding Elders* of the *Methodist Episcopal Church*, in *Council assembled* at *Baltimore*, on the first day of December, 1789.

"'The following members which formed the Council were present:

"'FRANCIS ASBURY, *Bishop*.

"'*Elders*.

"'Richard Ivey,	Nelson Reid,
Reuben Ellis,	Joseph Everett,
Edward Morris,	John Dickins,
James O'Kelly,	James O. Cromwell,
Philip Bruce,	Freeborn Garrettson.'
Lemuel Green,	

"After having spent one hour in prayer to Almighty God for his direction and blessing, they then unanimously agreed, that a General Conference of the bishops, ministers, and preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, on the Continent of *America*, would be attended with a variety of difficulties, with great expense and loss of time, as well as many inconveniences to the work of God. And, as it is almost the unanimous judgment of the ministers and preachers that it is highly expedient there should be a general Council formed of the most experienced elders in the connection, who, for the future, being elected by ballot in every Conference, at the request of the bishop, shall be able to represent the several Conferences and districts in the United States of *America*, they therefore concluded that such a Council should be so appointed, and convened.

"'The Council then proceeded to form the following constitution, to wit:

"'The aforesaid Council, when assembled at the time and place appointed by the bishop, shall have power to mature and resolve on all things relative to the spiritual and temporal interests of the Church, viz.:

"'1. To render the time and form of public worship as similar as possible through all their congregations.

"'2. To preserve the general union of the ministers, preachers, and people in the Methodist doctrine and discipline.

"'3. To direct and manage all the printing which may be done, from time to time, for the use and benefit of the Methodist Church in *America*.

"'4. To conduct the plan of education, and manage all matters which may, from time to time, pertain to any college or houses built, or about to be built, as the property of the Methodist connection.

"'5. To remove, or receive and appoint the salary of any tutors, from time to time, employed in any seminary of learning belonging to the said Connection.

"'6. In the intervals of the Council, the bishop shall have power to act in all contingent occurrences relative to the printing business, or the education and economy of the college.

"'7. Nine members, and no less, shall be competent to form a Council, which may proceed to business.

"'8. No resolution shall be formed in such a Council without the consent of the bishop and two-thirds of the members present.'

"After the Council had finished the constitution as above, they then proceeded, with perfect unanimity, to form the following resolutions:

"'1. *Every* resolution of the first Council shall be put to vote in each Conference, and shall not be adopted unless it obtains a majority of the different Conferences. But every resolution which is received by a majority of the several Conferences shall be received by every member of each Conference.

"'2. *Public* worship shall commence at 10 o'clock on the Lord's-day, in all places where we have societies and regular preaching, if it be practicable; and if it be not, at 11 o'clock.

"'3. The exercise of public worship on the Lord's day shall be singing, prayer, and reading the Holy Scriptures, with exhortation or reading a sermon, in the absence of a preacher; and the officiating person shall be appointed by the elder, deacon, or traveling preacher, for the time being.

"'4. *For the future* no more houses shall be built for public worship without the consent and direction of the Conference and presiding elder of the district, unless a house should be built under the direction of the presiding elder and the traveling preachers in the circuit, and finished without the least debt remaining on it.

"'5. It is required that all the parents and guardians of independent scholars in *Cokesbury* College may punctually pay for the students' tuition and board, on or before the first day of *December*, in every year, as none will be continued there more than one year on credit, but will be immediately sent home in case of non-payment. And for the future, at least one-fourth of the price of twelve months' board and tuition must be sent with every scholar who comes from the adjacent States, and half the said price with every scholar who comes from any distant State.

"'6. *Every* minister, preacher, and private member shall be permitted, and is hereby earnestly requested, to devise some means, and either bring or send his proposals to the next Council, for the purpose of laying some scheme for relieving our dear brethren who labor in the extremities of the work, and do not receive more than six, eight, ten, twelve, or fifteen pounds per annum.

"'7. *Every* deacon shall be three years in a state of probation before he can be elected to the eldership.

"'8. *Considering* the weight of the Connection, the concerns of the college, and the printing business, it is resolved, that another Council shall be convened at *Baltimore* on the first day of December, 1790.'

"I have thought proper to insert the Minutes of the first Council at full length, that the plan, and the whole business thereof, may be understood in future; and that the reason may be known why it was opposed, and why it was so soon given up and rejected, both by the Methodist preachers and people.

"When the Council was first proposed, the preachers in each district were to have the power to reject or retain the measures which had been adopted by the Council. But when the proceedings of the Council came out, they had changed the plan, and determined that if a majority of the preachers in the different districts should approve of the proceedings of the Council, it should then be binding on every preacher in each district.

"The number of Conferences were increased, so that but a small number of preachers could collect at one place. There were fourteen Conferences appointed for the next year.

"In the latter part of the year 1790, the second and last Council met, and their Minutes began as follows:

"'*Minutes*, taken at a *Council* of the *Bishop* and Delegated *Elders* of the *Methodist Episcopal Church*, held at *Baltimore*, in the State of *Maryland*, December 1, 1790.

"'*Q.* What members are present?

"'*A. Francis Asbury*, bishop; *Freeborn Garrettson*, *Francis Poythress*, *Nelson Reid*, *John Dickins*, *Philip Bruce*, Isaac Smith, Thomas Bowen, *James O. Cromwell*, *Joseph Everett*, and Charles Connaway.[1]

"'*Q.* What power do this the Council consider themselves *invested* with by their electors?

"'*A.* First they *unanimously* consider themselves invested with *full* power to act *decisively* in all temporal matters. And secondly, to *recommend* to the several Conferences any new canons, or alterations to be made in any old ones.

"'*Q.* What can be done to promote the book-business?

"'*Q.* Who are appointed as traveling book stewards by the order of the Council?

"'*Q.* How shall such stewards be appointed for the future?

"'*Q.* What can be done to procure religious experiences and letters for the *Arminian Magazine*?

"'*Q.* Who shall form such a committee; that is, to examine letters and written experiences for the *Magazine*?

"'*Q.* What books shall be published in the course of the two following years?

---

[1] The names in italics were members of the first Council.

"'*Q.* Shall we publish Mr. *Wesley's* four volumes of sermons before the sitting of the next Council?

"'*Q.* What shall be done to support the credit and finish the building of *Cokesbury College?*

"'*Q.* Can *anything more* be done for *Cokesbury College?*

"'*Q.* What is the *expense* of the charity boys for the present year in *Cokesbury College?*

"'*Q.* Shall the bishop have power to draw any money out of the book profits, for the *partial* supply of any Church or preacher that may be in pressing need?

"'*A.* By the recommendation of the elder of a district, the bishop may draw as far as *three pounds* per month, but no farther.

"'*Q.* Who are the present teachers in *Cokesbury College?*

"'*A. Jacob Hall*, A. M., *Patrick M'Closkey*, and *Charles Tite.*

"'*Q.* Can anything be done to prevent the students of Cokesbury College from *trafficking* or *exchanging* their property with each other?

"'*Q.* As many of our Churches are unfinished and in debt, and our grave-yards unfenced, what can be done for *their* relief?

"'*Q.* As the presiding elders have only a *partial* supply of quarterly meetings, to *whom* shall they present their annual accounts?

"'*Q.* As the bishop is not supplied from the circuits, to *whom* shall he render his account?

"'*A.* To the Council.

"'*Q.* What shall be done, if an opening should be made, to settle a teacher or preacher among any of the *Indian Nations?*

"'*Q.* What advice shall we give our brethren who desire to erect district schools?

"'*Q.* What can be done toward the *relief* of our preachers, who can not obtain the salaries allowed by our canons?

"'*Q.* Who shall be appointed to superintend the economy of the college in the recess of the Council and the absence of the bishop?

"'*A. Nelson Reid, John Dickins*, and *Joseph Everett.*

"'*Q.* Who shall be appointed as factors to supply the college with whatever necessaries may be wanted?

"'*A.* William Wood and John Brevitt.

"'*Q.* Who shall be appointed to inspect the factors' bills and make their payments?

"'*A. Philip Rogers, Jesse Hollingsworth, Samuel Owings,* and *Emanuel Kent.*

"'*Q.* As we think it primitive, prudent, and *decent,* that men and women should sit apart in public congregations, what can be done to promote it amongst our people?

"'*Q.* What money is *now* in hand belonging to the preachers' fund?

"'*A.* One hundred and sixty-eight pounds, one shilling, and four pence.

"'*Q.* What can be done to secure money, that may be collected for this purpose, in *future?*

"'*Q.* How shall money be drawn from time to time out of the fund for the relief of distressed preachers?

"'*Q.* As the bishop complains that some preachers look to him for a supply of their deficiencies, what is the judgment of the Council in this case?

"'*Q.* As *some* of the members of Council complain of long and expensive journeys, what can be done for their assistance in future?

"'*Q.* When and where shall the next Council be held?

"'*A.* At *Cokesbury College* or *Baltimore,* on the 1st day of December, 1792.'

"There were thirty-one questions in these Minutes, which I have stated in the same form and order in which they stood in the Minutes of the Council. I have also given a few of the answers; but, the answers being of little or no consequence to the people in general, I have omitted the greater part of them; and only inserted such as might perhaps be satisfactory to the reader. I have thought proper to publish all the questions, that it may be seen in future in what manner the Council proceeded.

"This Council determined to have another meeting two years from that time; but their proceedings gave such dissatisfaction to our Connection in general, and to some of the traveling preachers in particular, that they were forced to abandon the plan; and there has never since been a meeting of the kind.

"When the first Council met, I wrote them a letter in which I stated my objections to their plan, and pointed out the difficulties that it would produce, and contended for a General Conference; which plan was disapproved of by all the Council.

"The most violent opposer of the Council among the traveling preachers was at first one of that body; namely, James O'Kelly. While he was at the first Council he appeared to be united to the plan and to the members; but after he returned to Virginia, he exclaimed bitterly against the proceedings and against what he himself had done in the business. He refused to have anything at all to do with the second Council.

"The supposition respecting this sudden change in the old man, and his hasty conduct in condemning what he had just before sanctioned, was, that he went to the first Council with some expectation of being promoted in the Church; but, finding himself disappointed, he returned home greatly mortified.

"We have sufficient reason to believe that the establishment of the Council was very injurious to the Methodist Connection. The plan produced such difficulties in the minds of the preachers and the people, and brought on such opposition, that it was hard to reconcile them one to another. Nothing would or could give satisfaction to the preachers but the calling together all the traveling preachers in a General Conference; to which, after some time, the bishop consented."[1]

Commenting on the adoption of the Council idea, Dr. Bangs observes:

"Though the preachers generally voted for the plan when it was submitted to them by the bishops, dissatisfaction soon sprang up in their minds in reference to it, on account of its being dangerous, as they thought, to their liberties. It was contended that as the Council was composed of the bishops and presiding elders, and as the latter were appointed by the bishops and changed at their pleasure, it was virtually concentrating all the authority of the Church in the hands of the bishops, and thus creating an aristocracy of

[1] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, pp. 150-159.

power incompatible with the rights and privileges of the entire body."[1]

Thomas Ware, who was one of the active preachers of that day, and was opposed to the Council from the beginning, tells us that "The loss of time in attending the General Conference was great; to which, if we add the expense and fatigue, we may see the motives that influenced the bishops to propose a Council. That these were weighty reasons, none could deny; and an unwillingness to oppose Bishop Asbury led a majority of the preachers to yield so far as to permit the experiment to be made. A minority, however, opposed it from the first; and I happened to be one of that number. I had ventured to say, if there must be a Council to consist of bishops and presiding elders, the latter should be chosen, not by the bishops, but by the Conferences, and everything done in Council should be by a simple majority. Much as I respected our superintendents, for one, I could not consent to give them a negative on all future proceedings. I was not disposed to charge the projectors of the plan with any other than the purest motives. Others, however, I was persuaded would do so. And, on the whole, it was better, in my opinion, to abandon the Council altogether. He [Bishop Asbury] then gave me some severe rebukes; but, nevertheless, appointed me a presiding elder. The experiment of a Council was

[1] Nathan Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, N. Y., 1857, 10th Ed., Vol. I, pp. 304, 305.

made; but after its second meeting, it was abandoned forever."[1]

In two years the experiment demonstrated its unacceptability, and its promoters were glad to let it drop out of sight. As Sherman observes: "The Council had become so generally odious to preachers and people that Asbury himself requested that it might be named no more. Highly and justly as they esteemed Asbury, they were not prepared to make him a pope."[2]

Thus the Council expired and was buried; but in history it lives to illustrate the fact that in all governments two forces are in action—one toward a centralization of power, and another toward a diffusion of power. The first tends to despotism; the latter, to anarchy. In democracies there is a tendency to concentration; in despotisms there is a tendency to dissolution. Safety is in the mean between the extremes.

In Church as well as in State there must be eternal vigilance that liberty may be preserved. What has been may be. Human nature in ecclesiastical affairs is the same as in State affairs, and needs checks and balances in the one as in the other; and too much must not be taken for granted in the one, any more than in the other. The Council was a move toward centralization, but the Church asserted itself in time to prevent its becoming a permanent part of the economy of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Government by the Conference once more asserted itself.

[1] Autobiography of Rev. Thomas Ware, New York, 1840, pp. 181, 182.
[2] David Sherman, D. D., History of Discipline, Ed. of 1890, Note, p. 297.

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUADRENNIAL GENERAL CONFERENCE.

THE Council experiment had utterly failed, and yet the need of some arrangement by which all the preachers could have a voice and a vote in making the laws in a more convenient manner than passing the measure from Conference to Conference, still remained.

To have all the preachers come together in one place, for the purpose of deliberating and deciding upon matters relating to the government, had many advantages over the system of submitting every enactment to each Annual Conference. Thus it permitted all to hear the same discussion, and, after hearing the arguments *pro* and *con*, the members were more likely to reach a satisfactory conclusion than when separated in a large number of distinct bodies. In the latter case, each Conference would hear only its own speakers, and so would not have the benefit of the concentrated wisdom of the whole Church. The General Conference idea was the only one that promised relief.

Bishop Asbury was the promoter of the Council plan, to which Bishop Coke does not appear to have given much sympathy. At least, after it had been tested and had caused much dissatisfaction, he seems to have strongly opposed the arrangement.

On the 23d of February, 1791, Bishop Coke, who had been shipwrecked off Edisto, came to Charleston, South Carolina. Bishop Asbury met him at this time, and it is evident that Bishop Coke expressed himself very vigorously against a continuance of the Council, and in favor of a general conference of the preachers.

Bishop Asbury, under this day, makes this entry in his journal: "I found the Doctor's sentiments with regard to the Council quite changed. James O'Kelly's letters had reached London. I felt perfectly calm, and acceded to a general conference for the sake of peace."[1]

It will thus be seen that to Bishop Coke is due the credit of reversing the tendency to centralize the government in one or a few, of restoring the supremacy of the body of the preachers, and also of establishing regular General Conferences.

During this year, owing to the wide-spread dissatisfaction which existed among the preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church on account of matters connected with the Council and tendencies to which we have alluded, Bishop Coke began to fear that divisions would take place. Perceiving what he believed was an imminent danger, and desiring to prevent the threatened disintegration of American Methodism, Bishop Coke, writing from Richmond, on the 24th of April, 1791, addressed a confidential letter to Bishop White, of the Protestant Episcopal

[1] Bishop Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. II, p. 95.

Church, suggesting "a reunion" between the two communions."[1]

For this act Bishop Coke has been severely criticised; but when the circumstances are considered, there are grounds for a charitable judgment, and especially as a few years later he practically admitted that he had made a mistake.[2]

In a communication to the General Conference of 1808, Bishop Coke alludes to animadversions upon that noted letter, and says:

"There are very few of you who can possibly recollect anything of what I am next going to add. Many of you were then only little children. We had at that time no regular General Conferences. One only had been held, in the year 1784. I had indeed, with great labor and fatigue, a few months before I wrote this letter to Bishop White, prevailed on James O'Kelly, and the thirty-six traveling preachers who had withdrawn with him from all connection with Bishop Asbury, to submit to the decision of a General Conference. This Conference was to be held in about a year and a half after my departure from the States. And at this Conference, held I think the latter end of 1792, I proposed and obtained that great blessing to the American Connection—a permanency for General Conferences, which were to be held at stated times. Previously to the holding of this Conference (except the general one held in 1784), there were only small district meetings, excepting the Council, which was held at Cokesbury College, either in 1791 or 1792. Except the union which most justly subsisted between Bishop Asbury on the one hand and the preachers and people on the other, the society as such, taken as an aggregate, was almost like a rope of sand. I longed to see matters on a footing likely to be permanent. Bishop Asbury did the same; and it was that

[1] See Bishop Coke's Letter in Bangs's History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 1853, 3d Ed., Vol. II, pp. 200-204.

[2] *Id.*, p. 210.

view of things, I doubt not, which led Bishop Asbury, the year before, to call and endeavor to establish a regular Council, who were to meet him annually at Cokesbury. For this point I differed in sentiment from my venerable brother. But I saw the danger of our situation, though I well knew that God was sufficient for all things. I did verily believe then that, under God, the Connection would be more likely to be saved from convulsions by a union with the old Episcopal Church than any other way—not by dereliction of ordination, sacraments, and the Methodist Discipline, but by a junction on proper terms."[1]

This revealed three things: First, that Bishop Coke wrote the letter to Bishop White because he believed the Methodist Episcopal Church was in danger through internal dissensions; second, that he neither originated nor approved the Council scheme; and third, that he suggested and secured the establishment of stated General Conferences.

Bishop Coke's impulses placed him on the side of liberal government, and in numerous instances he advocated the rights of the body of the preachers. In this instance his influence was thrown in favor of a General Conference, as a means of checking disorganizing tendencies, and as a more equitable system of government.

When Bishop Coke returned to the United States early in 1791, he appears at once to have suggested the calling of a General Conference, and, as already stated, Bishop Asbury acceded "for the sake of peace." The result was that a General Conference of all the preachers was called for 1792. Prob-

[1] See Letter in Bangs's History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 1853, 3d Ed., Vol. II, pp. 206-210.

ably the matter was submitted by the bishops to all the Conferences, and, as Bangs remarks, "This was, it seems, agreed upon by the several Annual Conferences which had been held this year."[1]

The records of "the first regular General Conference," as Lee terms it, have not been preserved in separate form, but what was done was incorporated in the Discipline of 1792, and appears in the works of contemporaneous writers, and particularly in Lee's History. Lee informs us that,—

"On the first day of November, 1792, the first regular General Conference began in Baltimore. Our preachers who had been received into full connection came together from all parts of the United States where we had any circuits formed, with an expectation that something of great importance would take place in the Connection in consequence of that Conference. The preachers generally thought that in all probability there would never be another Conference of that kind, at which all the preachers in connection might attend. The work was spreading through all the United States and the different Territories, and was likely to increase more and more, so that it was generally thought that this Conference would adopt some permanent regulations which would prevent the preachers in future from coming together in a General Conference. This persuasion brought out more of the preachers than otherwise would have attended.

"By this time the plan of the former *Council* had become exceedingly disagreeable to the greater part of our brethren, both preachers and people; and it was expected that some of the preachers would try, in that Conference, to revive and establish it. But we were agreeably disappointed; for soon after we met together, the *bishops* and the preachers in general showed a disposition to drop the *Council* and all things belonging thereunto; and the bishop requested that the name

[1] Nathan Bangs, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, N. Y., 1857, 10th Ed., Vol. I, p. 343.

of the *Council* might not be mentioned in the Conference again. No one attempted to bring forward that business afterwards.

"The Conference proceeded, in the first place, to form some rules and regulations for conducting the business which lay before them. To that end there was a committee appointed of the oldest preachers and a few chosen from those that were younger in the work. This committee was to consider matters among themselves, and when a majority of them agreed to make any alteration in our form of Discipline, they were to make report to the Conference. One of the rules for the regulation of the Conference was this: 'It shall take two-thirds of all the members of the Conference to make a new rule, or abolish an old one; but a majority may alter or amend any rule.'

"The committee was afterwards increased by adding more preachers to it; but, after all, it was found to be of no real use; for if a few of the committee were opposed to anything that was adopted by a majority of their brethren, when the business was brought before the whole of the Conference, those that were dissatisfied before would take an active part in the debates, and all the arguments that had been brought forward in the committee would be taken up again, which did not answer the end intended. It had been thought that a committee would arrange matters so as to expedite the business; but after trying it, we found that it had the contrary effect. The committee was then given up, and any preacher was at liberty to bring forward any motion; and the Conference proceeded to establish or reject it, according to the above regulation, either by the voice of a majority or two-thirds, as the case might require."[1]

"One rule for our debates was, 'That each person, if he choose, shall have liberty to speak three times on each motion.'"[2]

"At that General Conference we revised the form of Discipline, and made several alterations. The proceedings of that Conference were not published in separate Minutes, but

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, Baltimore, 1810, pp. 176-178.
[2] *Id.*, p. 179.

the alterations were entered at their proper places, and published in the next edition of the form of Discipline, which was the eighth edition."

The title-page of that edition was as follows: "The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, revised and approved at the General Conference held at Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, in November, 1792, in which Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury presided."

In the Bishop's Address to the Members of the Methodist Societies in the United States they say:

"We have made some little alteration in the present edition, yet such as affects not in any degree the essentials of our doctrine and Discipline. We think ourselves obliged frequently to view and review the whole order of our Church, always aiming at perfection.

"We determined at this Conference to have another General Conference at the end of four years, to be held in Baltimore on the first of November, 1796. We also agreed that all the traveling preachers who should be in full connection at the time of holding the next General Conference should be entitled to a seat.

"It was likewise determined that the districts should be formed according to the judgment of the bishops; yet so as not to include more than twelve, nor less than three circuits in a district. Moreover it was also said: 'The bishop shall appoint the time of holding the district Conferences.'[1]

"We had also this: 'N. B.—In case there be no bishop to travel through the districts and exercise the episcopal office on the account of death, the districts shall be regulated in every respect by the district Conferences and the presiding elders, till the ensuing General Conference (ordination only excepted).'"[2]

"The fifth section had respect to the presiding elders. Such an order of elders had never been regularly established

[1] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, Baltimore, 1810, pp. 180-181.
[2] *Id.*, p. 182.

before. They had been appointed by the bishop for several years; but it was a doubt in the minds of the preachers whether such power belonged to him. The General Conference now determined that there should be presiding elders, and that they should be chosen, stationed, and changed by the bishop. However, a new rule was formed respecting them, as follows: 'The bishop shall not allow an elder to preside in the same district more than four years successively.'"[1]

This General Conference made many changes in the Discipline. As Lee remarks: "It was eight years from the Christmas Conference, where we became a regular Church, to this General Conference. In which time our form of Discipline had been changed and altered in so many particulars, and the business of the Council had thrown the Connection into such confusion that we thought proper at this Conference to take under consideration the greater part of the form of Discipline, and either abolish, establish, or change the rules, so that we might all approve of, or be reconciled to, whatever might be found in the Discipline."[2]

It was at the General Conference of 1792 that the Rev. James O'Kelly proposed his historic amendment to the Discipline, as follows:

"After the bishop appoints the preachers at Conference to their several circuits, if any one think himself injured by the appointment, he shall have liberty to appeal to the Conference and state his objections; and if the Conference approve his objections, the bishop shall appoint him to another circuit."[3]

---

[1] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, Baltimore, 1810, p. 183.
[2] *Id.*, pp. 192-193. [3] *Id.*, p. 178.

Lee states that "this motion brought on a long debate; the arguments for and against the proposal were weighty and handled in a masterly manner;" but "when the vote was taken, the motion was lost by a large majority."

This matter caused great anxiety in the mind of Bishop Asbury, who wrote:

"I felt awful at the General Conference which began November 1, 1792. At my desire they appointed a moderator and preparatory committee to keep order and bring forward the business with regularity. We had heavy debates on the first, second, and third sections of our form of Discipline. My power to station the preachers without an appeal was much debated, but finally carried by a very large majority. Perhaps a new bishop, new Conference, and new laws would have better pleased some. I have been much grieved for others, and distressed with the burthen I bear and must hereafter bear. . . .

"Some individuals among the preachers having their jealousies about my influence in the Conference, I gave the matter wholly up to them, and to Dr. Coke, who presided. Meantime I sent them the following letter:

"'MY DEAR BRETHREN,—Let my absence give you no pain. Dr. Coke presides. I am happily excused from assisting to make laws by which myself am to be governed. I have only to obey and execute. I am happy in the consideration that I never stationed a preacher through enmity or as a punishment. I have acted for the glory of God, the good of the people, and to promote the usefulness of the preachers. Are you sure that, if you please yourselves, the people will be

as fully satisfied? They often say, "Let us have such a preacher;" and sometimes, "We will not have such a preacher; we will sooner pay him to stay at home." Perhaps I must say, "His appeal forced him upon you." I am one, ye are many. I am as willing to serve you as ever. I want not to sit in any man's way. I scorn to solicit votes. I am a very trembling, poor creature to hear praise or dispraise. Speak your minds freely, but remember, you are only making laws for the present time; it may be, that as in some other things, so in this, a future day may give you further light.

"'I am yours, etc.,

"'FRANCIS ASBURY.'"[1]

The result was, that Mr. O'Kelly withdrew, and formed a body called the "Republican Methodists." Subsequently the name was changed to "The Christian Church;" but that body soon ceased to exist.

It is not our province to discuss this matter, though it has much historic interest.[2] We must content ourselves at this time with the results of this General Conference as bearing upon the development of Conference government.

The effect in general was to strengthen the power of the body of the ministry. Among other things the Conference placed the power of electing bishops in the General Conference, and made the bishops amenable to the General Conference, which body would have power to expel a bishop for improper conduct.

In answer to the question, "Who shall compose the General Conference?" it was decided that "all the traveling preachers who shall be in full connec-

[1] Bishop Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. II, pp. 146, 147.

[2] See Lee's History of the Methodists, pp. 178–180; 202–206.

tion at the time of holding the Conference;" and thus it stood until 1800, when the General Conference of that year amended the answer so that it read: "All the preachers who have traveled four years, and are in full connection at the time of holding the Conference."

In 1804 it was changed to read: "All the preachers who shall have traveled four years from the time they were received on trial by an Annual Conference, and are in full connection at the time of holding the Conference."[1]

Thus it will be seen that the limitations increased with the years. At first every traveling preacher was a member of the General Conference if he was a full member of an Annual Conference at the time the General Conference convened. In eight years there was another requirement; namely, he must not only be in full connection but he must also have traveled as an itinerant preacher four years; and four years after that it was made a requisite that he had traveled four years from the time he was received on probation in an Annual Conference. According to the first arrangement he might have been a member after itinerating only two years, for in that time one might be received into full membership in the Annual Conference; under the second he must have traveled four years, but two of these might have been prior to his being received "on trial;" while under the third arrangement the four years were to count from the time he was received on probation, so that though he might have served as a supply or helper a number of years before that,

[1] See Discipline for the above years.

the years prior to admission would not count in his favor. Prior to the General Conference of 1792 the members in the Annual Conferences could make laws for the whole Church, though they met separately in distinct Conferences,—the method being, as we have already seen, to propose the measure in the first Conference of the year, and then to present it to the other Conferences as they convened; and if the measure obtained a majority in each Conference, it became a law. It was possible under the former arrangement, without an assembling of all the ministers in one place, to elect a bishop; and so it happens that in 1788 a new question was added to the list of questions for a Conference session; namely, "Is there any other business to be done in the Conference?" and the answer was: "The electing and ordaining of bishops, elders, and deacons."[1]

By the act of the preachers assembled in the General Conference of 1792, the power to elect officers for the Church was taken from the yearly Conferences, and vested in the Quadrennial General Conference. Thus it was specified that bishops were to be elected by, and be amenable to, the General Conference.[2] In the interim a committee of ministers could suspend a bishop for a matter reflecting on his moral character; but only the General Conference could expel him. A similar change was made in regard to legislative enactments. By the decision of the General Conference of 1792 the law-making power was taken from the several Annual

[1] Discipline for 1788. [2] *Id.*, 1792.

Conferences sitting separately, and all legislative power was vested in the General Conference, which was to meet once in four years; and from that time new laws, or changes in the old laws, could be made only once in four years, and then only by the ministers eligible to membership in the General Conference, and in General Conference assembled.

Thus directly and by implication the action of this assembly of all the ministers—representing the then governing power of the Methodist Episcopal Church—the supreme legislative, judicial, and executive power of the Church was now vested in the General Conference, which was to meet once in four years.

To this Quadrennial General Conference, constituted as before stated, bishops and ordained ministers, preachers and people, Conferences and Churches, were to be subject. Its authority was to touch the highest official in the general Church, as well as the humblest member in the local Church. It was to make the laws, to interpret the laws, and, directly or indirectly, to execute the laws. It represented the Church—it was the Church for all these purposes.

It is true the ordinary lay members of the Church were not present in the General Conference of 1792, either in person or by delegate directly elected by themselves; yet, nevertheless, it represented the governing power of the Church.

The people conceded the governing power to the preachers, and from the beginning acquiesced in what they decided, just as they did when the Church was organized in 1784. In a sense, the ministry made

the Church by their labors; and the people, who had been educated to reverence the clergy as shepherds appointed by the Great Shepherd of all to oversee the flock of Christ, found no difficulty in committing to the ministry the government of the general Church.

Lee informs us that "the proceedings of this General Conference gave great satisfaction to our preachers and people, and the divisive spirit which had been prevailing in different parts of our Connection was considerably checked. And nothing that was done gave more satisfaction than the plan that was laid for having another General Conference at the expiration of four years from that time, to which all the preachers in full connection were at liberty to come."[1]

The Quadrennial General Conference had now become a permanent institution. The next one met in Baltimore, October 20, 1796, though the General Conference of 1792 directed that it should be held "on the first day of November, in the year 1796, in the town of Baltimore."[2] The second regular General Conference, just before its adjournment, resolved that the next General Conference would be held "in Baltimore, on the 20th of October, in the year 1800;"[3] but it met in that year on the 6th day of May.

This is explained by a resolution presented on

---

[1] Jesse Lee, History of Methodists, 1810, p. 198.

[2] Discipline for 1792.

[3] Journals of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 1855, Vol. I, p. 29.

the second day of the session. The record is as follows:

"Brother Snethen moved that, '*whereas*, the General Conference, held in the city of Baltimore, A. D., 1796, did resolve that the following General Conference should meet in the said city of Baltimore upon the twentieth day of October, A. D., 1800; and *whereas*, the prevalence of a very malignant epidemic disorder, called the yellow fever, in Baltimore and other sea-port towns, made it doubtful whether it would be possible for the said General Conference to meet at that session of the year; and *whereas*, Mr. Asbury did, by the advice of certain judicious friends, lay the case before the yearly Conferences, and they likewise judged an alteration highly necessary, and did appoint the time of meeting (for the above reason only) to be Tuesday, the 6th of May, A. D., 1800,—

"'*Resolved*, That this General Conference now met according to the above alteration and appointment, do unanimously approve of the said alteration, and ratify it accordingly.'"

The Journal states that the resolution "carried."[1]

It will be remembered that Lee stated that the General Conference of 1792 formed "some rules and regulations for conducting the business," but in the Journal of the General Conference of 1800 we have the first comprehensive series of rules of order adopted by a General Conference.

As they have an historical interest, we quote:

"The following rules were agreed upon for the order of the Conferences:

"1. Any person speaking shall not be interrupted, except by the presidents, when they judge that he deviates too much from the point; nevertheless, an appeal may be made to the Conference by any two members from the presidents, but neither the Conference nor the presidents shall speak to the point, but simply take the vote.

[1] Journal of General Conference, Vol. I, for years 1796-1836, p. 32.

"2. No person shall have liberty to speak above a quarter of an hour at a time, except with the permission of the Conference; but still the Conference shall grant or prohibit without debate.

"3. If any person thinks himself misrepresented by a speaker, he shall have a right to explain, in as few words as possible, after the speaker has done.

"4. No person shall speak oftener than three times on any question.

"5. The sittings of Conference shall be from nine to twelve in the morning, and from three to six in the afternoon.

"6. No question shall be proposed on a different subject from that under debate, until the question debated be decided or postponed.

"7. A secretary shall be chosen by the Conference, who shall keep a regular journal of all the proceedings of the Conference, which journal shall be signed by the presidents and countersigned by the secretary at the close of the Conference.

"8. Nicholas Snethen is elected secretary.

"9. No motion shall be put, except by the presidents, unless it be first delivered at the table in writing, after being read by the mover and seconded.

"10. No old rule shall be abolished except by a majority of two-thirds.

"11. No member of the Conference shall leave the city of Baltimore until the Conference adjourn, without first obtaining leave of absence.

"12. No member shall leave the room to go into the city without leave.

"13. The bishops are requested to arrange, and, from time to time, to lay before the Conference such business as they may judge expedient, provided the above regulation does not affect the ninth rule.

"14. Any member shall have liberty to copy, at pleasure, any motion laid upon the table."[1]

These parliamentary rules are rather peculiar. They are very liberal in some particulars, and in

[1] General Conference Journal, 1855, Vol. I, pp. 31, 32.

others rather restricted. Some are very sound, even according to the practice of the present day, while the soundness of other rules would no doubt be questioned.

A few of the points are worthy of special notice. Thus: Only the president could interrupt a speaker; on an appeal no debate was allowed, and even the president could not state the reasons for his decision; a member might speak three times on a question; no member could leave the city without leave being granted by the Conference; the bishops were a committee to arrange and present business. The rule that a member shall not have a right to correct a misrepresentation until the speaker has finished his speech is not bad law even to-day.

At this Conference of 1800 it was agreed "that the election of a bishop shall be by ballot, written, and put into a box or drawer."[1] On the first ballot no one had a majority. On the second, "the tellers reported that there was a tie between Richard Whatcoat and Jesse Lee. They proceeded to a third ballot, when Richard Whatcoat was declared to be duly elected by a majority of four votes."[2]

The Journal of the Conference has this record:

"The Conference proceeded to the election of a bishop; the first poll being a tie, and supposed defective. Upon the second, there were fifty-nine votes for Brother Richard Whatcoat, fifty-five for Brother Jesse Lee, and one blank—the whole number of voters being one hundred and fifteen; whereupon Brother Richard Whatcoat was declared duly elected."[3]

[1] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 35.
[2] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, Baltimore, 1810, p. 266.
[3] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, pp. 36, 37.

We are inclined to give the preference to Rev. Jesse Lee's account, for one who was so nearly elected a bishop had probably a vivid recollection of the entire transaction. Further, Lee is usually very accurate, while most secretaries condense too much.

The General Conference of 1800 ordered the next General Conference to "be held in the city of Baltimore, on the sixth day of May, 1804;"[1] and Lee says it was held in that city and on that day,[2] but the General Conference Journal gives May 7th as the first day of the session.[3] It may be that on the 6th preliminary exercises were held, and that the business began the next day.

The three bishops were present at the General Conference of 1804. It was at this Conference that, on motion of the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, of Philadelphia, the Twenty-third Article of Religion was amended by striking out the words "General Act of Confederation," and inserting "Constitution of the United States," and after the word "States" inserting the words "are a sovereign and independent Nation."

Lee says: "We had several new regulations made at this General Conference; one was as follows: 'The bishops shall allow the Annual Conferences to sit a week at least.' Before this rule was established the bishop could conclude the business as soon as he thought proper."[4]

---

[1] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 43; Lee's History, p. 271.
[2] Lee's History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 295.
[3] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 49.
[4] Lee's History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 298.

The same member of the Conference laments "that there was very little stir of religion among us during the sitting of the Conference." Commenting on this, he says: "One principal reason of our barrenness, I believe, was owing to an improper plan which was adopted by the Conference in the beginning of their business, which was this: To admit men, women, and children into the galleries of the meeting-house to hear our debates. After a few days we were obliged to close the galleries and sit in private, according to our usual plan."[1] So in those days the public were not admitted to hear the deliberations.

Again, referring to this Conference, Lee says: "We had no Minutes of our General Conference published in a pamphlet this year, although it had been done at the preceding General Conferences; but the alterations and additions which were made to our rules were put into the chapters, sections, and paragraphs where they belonged in the Form of Discipline."[2]

The Conference remained in session until the 23d of May, and, "on several motions, the next General Conference was appointed to meet in four years; viz., on May 1, 1808, at Baltimore."[3] But the Journal states that the Conference began on the 6th of May.[4]

Thus from 1792 to 1808, General Conferences

[1] Rev. Jesse Lee's History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 300.
[2] *Id.*, p. 298.
[3] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 68.
[4] *Id.*, p. 72; Lee's History of the Methodists, p. 345.

had been held once in four years; and the Quadrennial General Conference, having been thoroughly tested, was firmly incorporated in the economy of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DELEGATED GENERAL CONFERENCE.

FROM 1792, when the first regular Quadrennial General Conference was held, to 1808, the Methodist Episcopal Church had made great progress. In 1792 there were 266 preachers, while in 1808 there were 540, the number having more than doubled in sixteen years. The membership in 1792 was 65,980; but in 1808 it had grown to 151,995, very much more than double.

The ministers were scattered all over the country from the extreme north to the southern limit, and as far west as the Mississippi River, so that it was difficult for many of them to attend the General Conference.

The increasing difficulty of getting so many preachers together from such distant points, and the loss of time and service by their long absences from their charges in those days of slow travel, compelled thoughtful men to perceive the need of further modification.

From these reflections came the suggestion to change the composition of the General Conference so that it would contain, not all the elders, but representatives selected by the members of the several Annual Conferences.

To the Rev. Jesse Lee belongs the honor of being the first to suggest the idea of a delegated General Conference, and he made his suggestion before the General Conference of 1792 had convened.

Under date of Thursday, July 7, 1791, Asbury makes this entry in his journal:

"This day Brother Jesse Lee put a paper into my hand proposing the election of not less than two, nor more than four preachers from each Conference, to form a General Conference in Baltimore, in December, 1792, to be continued annually."[1]

Lee's suggestion was not accepted at the time, but no doubt it was the sowing of good seed from which came a good harvest.

The idea of a delegated General Conference was formally presented in the General Conference of 1800, but that body refused to sanction the arrangement. The Journal of that year contains the following under date of May 8th, the third day of the session:

"Brother Folleson moved, that—*Whereas*, much time has been lost, and always will be lost, in the event of a General Conference being continued; and *whereas*, the circuits are left without preachers for one, two, or three months, and other great inconveniences attend so many of the preachers leaving their work, and no real advantage arises therefrom,—

"*Resolved*, That instead of a General Conference we substitute a delegated one.

"Negatived."[2]

The resolution appears to have been reconsidered; for on May 15th there is this entry: "Brother Tol-

[1] Bishop Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. II, p. 110.

[2] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 34.

leson's motion for a delegated General Conference was called up, and lost by a large majority."[1]

In one place the name is spelled Folleson and in the other Tolleson. The probability is that the difference is a misprint by substituting an F for a T, and that in both places the name should be Tolleson. In the list of preachers as given in the Minutes of that time there is no one named Folleson, but there is a James Tolleson.

This James Tolleson was admitted on trial in 1791, and his name stands first in the list of those so admitted that year.[2] In 1793 he was admitted into full connection.[3] In 1799 his name appears among the elders,[4] and in that year he was stationed at Alexandria, Virginia.[5] In 1800 he was stationed at Norfolk, Va. This was his charge when he attended the General Conference of this year, for his Annual or District Conference met on the 10th of April while the General Conference met the following month. The Journal shows that in the General Conference he was quite an active member. In the month of August of the same year he died.

The Minutes of 1801 contain this mention:

"*Ques.* 10. Who have died this year?"

"*Ans.* 1. James Tolleson, a native of South Carolina. He labored as a traveling preacher between eight and nine years; during which time he filled several important stations with dignity and diligence, and moved from Georgia to New Jersey. He possessed promising abilities both in gifts and understand-

[1] General Couference Journal, Vol. I, p, 39.
[2] Minutes of Conferences, Ed. of 1813, p. 97. [3] *Id.*, p. 121.
[4] *Id.*, p. 219. [5] *Id.*, p. 228.

ing; but what is of infinitely more importance, he was a man of piety and uniform in his religious deportment. He died in August, 1800, of the malignant fever, in Portsmouth, Va., with due preparation and great resignation of mind, manifesting that he possessed a lively sense of his acceptance with God."[1]

Such was the man who has the distinction of first moving in a General Conference a proposition for the creation of a delegated General Conference.

The thought soon began to develop and took possession of many minds, and at last was taken up in a formal manner by the New York Annual Conference, and by it was presented to the attention of the other Annual Conferences.

The Rev. Jesse Lee states that, as early as 1806, the New York Conference made an attempt in this direction, and to it he takes strong exception. He says:

"In the course of the year 1806 there was a plan laid which would have overset and destroyed the rules and regulations of the Methodists respecting the election and ordination of bishops. It was said that the plan originated in the New York Conference, which was as follows: 'To call a delegated Conference of seven members from each Conference, chosen by the Conference, to meet in Baltimore, to meet on the 4th of July, 1807, to choose superintendents, etc. This plan was adopted by four of the Conferences; viz, New York, New England, the Western and South Carolina Conferences; and delegates were accordingly chosen. But when it was proposed to the Virginia Conference, which met in Newbern in February, 1807, they refused to take it under consideration, and rejected it as being pointedly in opposition to all the rules of our Church. The bishop labored hard to carry the point, but he labored in vain; and the whole business of that dan-

[1] Minutes of Conferences, Ed., 1813, p. 254.

gerous plan was overset by the Virginia Conference. The inventors and defenders of that project might have meant well; but they certainly erred in judgment."[1]

This was certainly a very remarkable and revolutionary project. It totally ignored the Quadrennial General Conference already established, and which had been by the authoritative body ordered for May, 1808. It was also unfair in its disproportionate representation, for by it the smallest Conference would have the same number of delegates as the largest. That the bishops should aid in promoting such a scheme seems very strange. Thanks to the spirited Virginia Conference, the project failed.

Dr. Nathan Bangs gives a slightly different version of the matter. He says:

"This year a paper was submitted to the Annual Conferences, beginning with the Baltimore Conference, by Bishop Asbury, in favor of calling a General Conference of seven delegates from each Annual Conference, to meet in the city of Baltimore, in May, 1807, for the purpose of strengthening the episcopacy. This paper was referred to a committee to consider and report thereon; and all the Conferences except Virginia reported in favor of the proposition, and elected their delegates accordingly. The report set forth, that in consequence of the declining health of Bishop Whatcoat—who was then supposed to be near his end—the great extension of our work over the continent, and the debilitated state of Bishop Asbury's health, it had become necessary to strengthen the episcopacy, and likewise to provide for a more permanent mode of Church government. The report therefore recommended that each of the seven Annual Conferences should elect seven delegates to meet in the city of Baltimore the succeeding May, and that, when so met, they should have power

[1] Rev. Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, pp. 344, 345.

to elect one bishop or more, and also to provide for a future *delegated* General Conference, whose powers should be defined and limited by constitutional restrictions; for hitherto the General Conference possessed unlimited powers over our entire economy—could alter, abolish, or add to any article of religion or any rule of Discipline. As this depositary of power was considered too great for the safety of the Church and the security of its government and doctrine; and as the assembling of all the elders, few or many at the option of each Annual Conference, made the representation very unequal; and moreover if all came who had a right to a seat, involved a great amount of expense, time, and money,—Bishop Asbury was exceedingly desirous, before he should depart hence, to provide a remedy for these evils; and this desire was strengthened and excited to action at this time by the concurrent views and wishes of most of the oldest preachers in the Conferences.

"It is proper to remark that this plan was concurred in and the delegates were elected by all the Annual Conferences until it was submitted to the Virginia Conference, where, being warmly opposed by the Rev. Jesse Lee, who had great influence in that Conference, a majority voted against its adoption, and so the whole plan was abandoned for the present; for it was the understanding that, unless all the Conferences concurred in the measure, it should not be carried into effect. This defeat of a favorite project so feasible in itself, and apparently so necessary to the prosperity of the Church and the perpetuity of her institutions, was a source of great grief to Bishop Asbury as well as of regret to those who had concurred in his views."[1]

So Dr. Bangs appears to attribute the movement to Bishop Asbury, and says the Baltimore was the first Conference to take it up; but Lee may be right in saying it originated in the New York Conference, at least among its members.

However this may be, serious objections may be

[1] N. Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1853, 3d Ed., Vol. II, pp. 177, 178.

raised against the project even as stated by Dr. Bangs; for he only shifts the responsibility.

Later, however, the New York Conference renewed the idea of a delegated General Conference in an unobjectionable way.

On the 7th of May, 1807, the New York Conference drew up and adopted a memorial to the General Conference praying for the creation of "a representative delegated General Conference" to take the place of that which was composed of all the traveling preachers in full connection at the time of holding the Conference, and had traveled four years from the time that they were received on trial by an Annual Conference.

In this memorial there was a request that the preachers in all the Annual Conferences which would meet before the session of the General Conference of 1808 join in the memorial to the General Conference.

The memorial is as follows:

"THE MEMORIAL OF THE NEW YORK CONFERENCE TO THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES, TO SIT IN BALTIMORE, THE SIXTH OF MAY, 1808:

"VERY DEAR BRETHREN,—We, as one of the seven eyes of the great and increasing body of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, which is composed of about five hundred traveling preachers and about two thousand local preachers, together with upward of one hundred and forty thousand members; these, with our numerous congregations and families, spread over an extent of country more than two —— miles from one end to the other, amounting in all probability to more than one million of souls, which are directly or remotely under our pastoral oversight and ministerial charge, should engage our most sacred attention, and

should call into exertion all the wisdom and talents we are possessed of to perpetuate the unity and prosperity of the whole Connection, and to estab'ish such regulations, rules, and forms of government as may, by the blessing of God in Jesus Christ, promote the cause of that religion which is more precious to us than riches, honor, or life itself, and be conducive to the salvation of souls among the generations yet unborn. The fields are white unto harvest before us, and the opening prospect of the great day of glory brightens continually in our view; and we are looking forward with hopeful expectations for the universal spread of Scriptural truth and holiness over the inhabitable globe. Brethren, for what have we labored; for what have we suffered; for what have we borne the reproach of Christ, with much long-suffering, with tears and with sorrow, but to serve the great and eternal purpose of the grace of God in the present and everlasting felicity of immortal souls? When we take a serious and impartial view of this important subject, and consider the extent of our Connection, the number of our preachers, the great inconvenience, expense, and loss of time that must necessarily result from our present regulations relative to our General Conference, we are deeply impressed with a thorough conviction that a representative or delegated General Conference, composed of a specific number on principles of equal representation from the several Annual Conferences, would be much more conducive to the prosperity and general unity of the whole body, than the present indefinite and numerous body of ministers, collected together unequally from the various Conferences, to the great inconvenience of the ministry and injury of the work of God. We therefore present unto you this memorial, requesting that you will adopt the principle of an equal representation from the Annual Conferences, to form, in future, a delegated General Conference, and that you will establish such rules and regulations as are necessary to carry the same into effect.

"As we are persuaded that our brethren in general, from a view of the situation and circumstances of the connection, must be convinced, upon mature and impartial reflection, of the propriety and necessity of the measure, we forbear to enumerate the various reasons and arguments which might be urged in support of it. But we do hereby instruct, advise, and

request every member who shall go from our Conference to the General Conference to urge, if necessary, every reason and argument in favor of the principle, and to use all their Christian influence to have the same adopted and carried into effect.

"And we also shall, and do, invite and request our brethren in the several Annual Conferences, which are to sit between this and the General Conference, to join and unite with us in the subject matter of this memorial. We do hereby candidly and openly express our opinion, and wish, with the firmest attachment to the union and prosperity of the connection, hoping and praying that our Chief Shepherd and Bishop of our Souls, the Lord Jesus Christ, may direct you in all wisdom, righteousness, brotherly love, and Christian unity.

"We are, dear brethren, in the bonds of gospel ties, most affectionately yours, etc.

"By order and in behalf of the New York Conference, without a dissenting vote.

"(Signed,) FRANCIS WARD, *Secretary.*

"COEYMANS PATENT, May 7, 1807."[1]

Following the memorial from the New York Conference, the Journal of the General Conference of 1808 gives the following certificates:

"The Eastern Conference[2] unamiously voted to concur with the New York Conference in the subject matter of the above memorial. "THOMAS BRANCH, *Secretary.*

"BOSTON CONFERENCE, June 3, 1807."

"The Western Conference unanimously voted to concur with the New York Conference in the subject matter of the above memorial. "WILLIAM BURKE, *Secretary.*

"CHILLICOTHE, O., September 16, 1807."

"The South Carolina Conference, with the exception of five members, concur with the New York Conference in the above memorial. "LEWIS MYERS, *Secretary.*

"JANUARY 2, 1808."[3]

---

[1] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, pp. 77-78.

[2] In the Journal called also the New England Conference.

[3] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, pp. 77, 78.

At that time there were seven Annual Conferences. It therefore appears that, for some reason, the Virginia, Baltimore, and Philadelphia Conferences did not concur. Possibly the memorial was not sent, or was not sent in time, to these Conferences; but as to this we have no information.

As it was, the measure had the unanimous support of a majority of the Conferences, though the three Conferences which had not concurred were stronger in every way than the four above named.

Jesse Lee, referring to the General Conference of 1808, remarks that "the two hundred and nineteenth [Conference] was the fifth General Conference, held in Baltimore on the 6th of May."[1] Again he says: "In the month of May we had our fifth and last General Conference."[2] By this he evidently meant the last general meeting of all the ministers who were in full membership and had traveled four years from the time they had been received on trial in an Annual Conference. Other General Conferences were held afterward, but they were not composed of the ministers generally. It will now be our purpose to give a detailed history of the transactions in the General Conference of 1808, which were based on the appeal for a delegated General Conference; and in this narration we will cite the exact language of the Journal of that body. On Monday afternoon, May 9, 1808, the memorial was read in the General Conference, but no action was taken that day.[3] The next morning

[1] Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists, 1810, p. 345. [2] *Id.*, p. 347.
[3] General Conference Journal for 1808, p. 76.

"Bishop Asbury called for the mind of the Conference, whether any further regulation in the order of the General Conference be necessary; the question was put, and carried in the affirmative."[1]

It was "moved by Stephen G. Roszel, and seconded by William Burke, that a committee be appointed to draw up such regulations as they may think best, to regulate the General Conferences, and report the same to this Conference. Carried."[2]

The next motion will probably excite surprise in the minds of those who are not familiar with the nature of the early General Conferences.

It was "moved by Bishop Asbury that the committee be formed from an equal number from each of the Annual Conferences. Carried."[3]

At that time the bishops were members of the General Conference, which was not a delegated body, but an assemblage of the elders or of the ministers who were in full membership in an Annual Conference, and had traveled at least four years from the time they had been received on probation in an Annual Conference. On that basis the bishops had equal rights on the floor with other presbyters.

It was then "moved by John McClaskey, and seconded by Joseph Aydelott, that the committee consist of three members from each Annual Conference, to be chosen by their own members present. Lost."[4]

Then it was "moved by Stephen G. Roszel, and

---

[1] General Conference Journal, 1808, p. 78. [2] *Id.*, p. 79.
[3] General Conference Journal, Ed. 1855, Vol. I, 1808, p. 79.
[4] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 79.

seconded by William Burke, that the committee be formed by two from each of the Conferences, chosen by their respective Conferences. Carried."[1]

The following preachers, namely, "Ezekiel Cooper and John Wilson from the New York, George Pickering and Joshua Soule from the New England Conference, William McKendree and William Burke from the Western, William Phœbus and Josias Randle from the South Carolina, Philip Bruce and Jesse Lee from the Virginia, Stephen G. Roszel and Nelson Reed from the Baltimore, and John McClaskey and Thomas Ware from Philadelphia Conference, were elected" the committee.[2]

This committee did not bring in a report until Monday morning, May 16th. That morning the first recorded item of business is as follows:

"Read the report of the committee relative to regulating and perpetuating General Conferences."[3]

Then the report was entered, as follows:

"WHEREAS, It is of the greatest importance that the doctrines, form of government, and general rules of the United Societies in America be preserved sacred and inviolable;

"And WHEREAS, Every prudent measure should be taken to preserve, strengthen, and perpetuate the union of the Connection;

"Therefore, your committee, upon the maturest deliberation, have thought it advisable that the third section of the Form of Discipline shall be as follows, viz.:

"SECTION III. OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

"1st. The General Conference shall be composed of delegates from the Annual Conferences.

[1] General Conference Journal, 1808, Vol. I, p. 79.
[2] General Conference Journal, Ed. 1855, Vol. I, p. 79. [3] *Id.*, p. 81.

"2d. The delegates shall be chosen by ballot, without debate, in the Annual Conferences respectively, in the last meeting of Conference previous to the meeting of the General Conference.

"3d. Each Annual Conference respectively shall have a right to send seven elders, members of their Conference, as delegates to the General Conference.

"4th. Each Annual Conference shall have a right to send one delegate, in addition to the seven, for every ten members belonging to such Conference over and above fifty—so that if there be sixty members, they shall send eight; if seventy, they shall send nine; and so on, in proportion.

"5th. The General Conference shall meet on the first day of May, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and twelve, and thenceforward on the first day of May, once in four years perpetually, at such place or places as shall be fixed on by the General Conference from time to time.

"6th. At all times, when the General Conference is met, it shall take two-thirds of the whole number of delegates to form a quorum.

"7th. One of the original superintendents shall preside in the General Conference; but in case no general superintendent be present, the General Conference shall choose a president *pro tem.*

"8th. The General Conference shall have full powers to make rules, regulations, and canons for our Church, under the following limitations and restrictions, viz.:

"The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion, nor establish any new standards of doctrine.

"They shall not lessen the number of seven delegates from each Annual Conference, nor allow of a greater number from any Annual Conference than is provided in the fourth paragraph of this section.

"They shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away episcopacy, or to destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency.

"They shall not revoke or change the General Rules of the United Societies.

"They shall not do away the privileges of our ministers

or preachers of trial by a committee, and of an appeal; neither shall they do away the privileges of our members of trial before the society, or by a committee, [and ?] of an appeal.

"They shall not appropriate the produce of the Book Concern or of the Charter Fund to any purpose other than for the benefit of the traveling, superannuated, supernumerary, and worn-out preachers, their wives, widows, and children.

"*Provided*, nevertheless, that upon the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions."[1]

This committee proposed, therefore, that the doctrines, forms of government, and the General Rules should be protected and preserved. As a means to this end, it proposed the formation of a General Conference. In the plan for its creation, it makes it a representative body; recognizes the right of every Conference to representation and in proportion to its membership; suggests the principle of election by ballot; gives the General Conference full power to make "rules, regulations, and canons" for the Church, under certain specified restrictions; and provides a method for amending these restrictions, which declares the proposed amendment must originate in the Annual Conferences.

Among the peculiar points in this report is the phrase, "original superintendents." What is meant by this? Coke and Asbury were "original superintendents," in the sense that they were the first selected by Wesley, and the first elected by the Methodist Episcopal Church in General Conference

[1] General Conference Journal, 1808, pp. 82, 83.

assembled. Whatcoat had died in 1806. At this General Conference of 1808, and on the 12th of May—four days before the report was presented—William McKendree was elected to the office of bishop.[1] Bishop Coke was out of the country, and the Conference, on the 9th of May, had passed the following:

"*Resolved*, That Dr. Coke's name shall be retained on our Minutes after the name of the bishop, in a N. B.—'Doctor Coke, at the request of the British Conference and by the consent of General Conference, resides in Europe;' he is not to exercise the office of superintendent or bishop among us in the United States until he be recalled by the General Conference, or by all the Annual Conferences respectively."[2]

This practically deposed Bishop Coke until he should be called as above. Of course this kind of a displacement was merely because he was out of the country much of the time, and because his attention was given largely to the interests of Methodism in Great Britain and her missions in the British possessions.

If "original" meant one of the first elected, then, according to this proposition, Bishop Asbury was the only bishop who could preside, and Bishop McKendree and others who might be elected could not preside over the General Conference, at least as long as Asbury was present.

The title "general superintendent" appears in this report probably for the first time in any formal or official document; but from this time it comes into common use.

[1] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 81. [2] *Id.*, p. 76.

As soon as the report had been read, it was "voted that the Conference proceed immediately to the subject of the report of the committee,"[1] and in the afternoon of the same day the Conference "continued the debate on the report of the committee of fourteen."[2]

Bangs says the report was discussed "for one whole day."[3]

After debate, and probably toward the close of the afternoon session of May 16th, it was "moved by Ezekiel Cooper, and seconded by Joshua Wells, to postpone the present question to make room for the consideration of a new resolution, as preparatory to the minds of the brethren to determine the present subject,"[4] and the motion prevailed.

It was then "moved by Ezekiel Cooper, and seconded by Joshua Wells, the following resolution, viz.:

"*Resolved*, That in the fifth section of Discipline, after the question, 'By whom shall the presiding elders be chosen?' the answer shall be, 'Ans. 1. Each Annual Conference respectively, without debate, shall annually choose, by ballot, its own presiding elders.'"[5]

The next day was devoted to the presiding elder question, and a motion to postpone was lost by a vote of fifty-nine nays to fifty-six ayes.

On the following morning May 18th, a ballot vote was taken on the motion for electing pre-

[1] General Conference Journal, 1808, p. 83.
[2] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 83.
[3] Nathan Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, 1853, 3d Ed., Vol. II, p. 231.
[4] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 83. [5] *Ibid.*

siding elders, and fifty-two voted in the affirmative and seventy three in the negative; so the motion was lost.[1]

On the afternoon of the same day (Wednesday, May 18th) the report of "the committee of fourteen," as it was called, was taken up, and it was "moved by John McClaskey, and seconded by Daniel Ostrander, that the vote on the first resolution of the report of the committee of fourteen be taken by ballot." The motion was carried, and "the first resolution of the report of the commitee of fourteen being put to vote, there were yeas, fifty-seven; nays, sixty-four," and the resolution was lost.[2]

Bangs states "the entire report was rejected by a majority of seven votes."[3]

The Journal states that "the first resolution" was voted down; but probably both statements harmonize; for the first resolution was that "the General Conference shall be composed of delegates from the Annual Conferences," and to vote this down was to vote against the whole idea of a delegated General Conference. Possibly the proposal that only an "original superintendent" could preside had something to do with the rejection of the report.

On Monday morning, May 23, 1808, consideration of the subject was resumed, and it was "moved by Enoch George, and seconded by Stephen G. Roszel, that the General Conference shall be composed of one member for every five members of each Annual

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 84. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] N. Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1853 3d Ed., Vol. II, p. 231.

Conference," and this was "carried by a very large majority."[1]

This showed a desire to keep the representation as large as possible. Immediately after the adoption of the previous motion, it was "moved by Joshua Soule, and seconded by George Pickering, that each Annual Conference shall have the power of sending their proportionate number of members to the General Conference, either by seniority or choice, as they shall think best."[2]

In the Minutes of the afternoon of the same day appears the record that "Brother Joshua Soule's motion of this morning, being put to vote, was carried."[3]

"Moved by Stephen G. Roszel, and seconded by George Pickering, that the next General Conference be held on the 1st of May, 1812. Carried."[4]

"Moved by William Thatcher, and seconded by Joseph Crawford, that the next General Conference be held in New York. For New York, fifty-six; for Baltimore, forty-eight. Carried."[5]

Heretofore all the General Conferences had been held in Baltimore; now, for the first time, it is agreed to hold one, and that the first delegated General Conference, in the city of New York.

Then it was "moved by Stephen G. Roszel, and seconded by Jesse Lee, that it shall take two-thirds of the representatives of all the Annual Conferences to form a quorum for business in the General Conference. For it, 53; against it, 46. Carried."[6]

[1] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 88. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.* [6] *Ibid.*

The next day, Tuesday, May 24th, it was "moved by Jesse Lee, and seconded by William Burke, that the next General Conference shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away episcopacy, or to destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency. Carried."[1]

"Moved by Stephen G. Roszel, and seconded by George Pickering, that one of the superintendents preside in the General Conference; but in case of the absence of a superintendent, the Conference shall elect a president *pro tem.* Carried."[2]

"Moved by Stephen G. Roszel, and seconded by Nelson Reed, that the General Conference shall have full powers to make rules and regulations for our Church, under the following restrictions, viz.:

"1. The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion, nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine. Carried.

"2. They shall not allow of more than one representative for every five members of the Annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every seven. Carried."[3]

At this point there seems to have been an interruption, for it was "moved by Daniel Hitt, and seconded by Samuel Coate, that a committee of three be appointed to modify certain exceptionable expressions in the General Rules. Lost."[4]

---

[1] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 89. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*

Then consideration of Mr. Roszel's proposition was resumed, as follows:

"3. They shall not revoke or change the 'General Rules of the United Societies.' Carried.

"4. They shall not do away the privileges of our ministers or preachers of trial by a committee, and of an appeal; neither shall they do away the privileges of our members of trial before the society, or by a committee, and of an appeal. Carried.

"5. They shall not appropriate the produce of the Book Concern or of the Charter Fund to any purpose other than for the benefit of the traveling, supernumerary, superannuated, and worn-out preachers, their wives, widows, and children. Carried.

"6. *Provided*, nevertheless, that upon the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions. Carried."[1]

On the afternoon of that day, May 24th, it was "moved by Daniel Ostrander, and seconded by Ezekiel Cooper, that the general superintendents, with or by the advice of all the Annual Conferences, or, if there be no general superintendent, all the Annual Conferences respectively, shall have power to call a ...eral Conference, if they judge it necessary at any time. Carried."[2]

It was then "moved by the chair that the General Conference shall meet on the first day of May, once in four years, perpetually, at such place or places as

[1] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 89. [2] *Id.*, p. 90.

shall be fixed on by the General Conference from time to time. Carried."[1]

On the afternoon of the last day of the session, and the closing session, May 26th, it was "moved by Joseph Totten, and seconded by Stephen G. Roszel, that no preacher shall be sent as a representative to the General Conference until he has traveled at least four full calendar years from the time that he was received on trial by an Annual Conference, and is in full connection at the time of holding the Conference. Carried."[2]

This is a *verbatim* statement of the action of the General Conference of 1808, as contained in the Journal of that Conference.

The order of voting seems peculiar, and the record appears to be greatly condensed. It is not stated that the resolutions adopted were presented as amendments to, or substitute for, the report of the committee; but the irregular way in which they were introduced by various individuals, gives them the appearance of individual and independent motions.

The order, perhaps, is not very parliamentary, if the resolutions are to be considered as amendments to the report; but the probable explanation is that the report, which had been voted down, was not reconsidered; but the matter was brought up piecemeal by various parties, and it will be noticed that there are variations from the language of the report. Thus, in the seventh resolution of the committee the title "general superintendent" is used; but in the

[1] General Conference Journal, Vol. I, p. 90. [2] *Id.*, p. 95.

resolution as proposed by Mr. Roszel, the title is simply "superintendent." Again, the report had no provision for calling an extra session of the General Conference; but Mr. Ostrander's resolution had such a provision.

To recapitulate, we find that on a ballot vote the first resolution of the committee was not agreed to on May 18th.

Then nothing appears to have been done until May 23d, when on the motion of Enoch George, it was decided that "the General Conference shall be composed of one member for every five members of each Annual Conference."

This appears to have taken the place of Resolutions 3 and 4 of the Committee's report.

Then came Joshua Soule's motion that "each Annual Conference shall have the power of sending their proportionate number of members to the General Conference, either by seniority or choice, as they shall think best."

Then followed Stephen G. Roszel's motion, that "the next General Conference be held on the first day of May, 1812."

Then William Thatcher's motion, that "the next General Conference be held in New York."

Then Stephen G. Roszel's motion, that "it shall take two-thirds of the representatives of all the Annual Conferences to form a quorum for business in the General Conference."

Then came Jesse Lee's motion, that "the General Conference shall not change or alter any part or rule

of our government, so as to do away episcopacy, or to destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency."

This is the same as the committee's third restriction, with the exception of the form of opening the paragraph. The committee had "They shall not change," etc. Lee made it "The General Conference shall not change," etc., which is better style.

Then followed Stephen G. Roszel's motion, that "One of the superintendents preside in the General Conference; but in case of the absence of a superintendent, the Conference shall elect a president *pro tem.*"

This is the substance of the committee's seventh paragraph, with verbal alterations. The committee had said: "One of the original superintendents shall preside," etc.

This, as already observed, seemed to mean Bishop Coke and Bishop Asbury, and was intended to confer an honor or rank upon them which the committee did not desire to give to their successors, at least as long as the "original superintendents," named by Mr. Wesley and elected by the Christmas Conference of 1784, survived.

Then followed Stephen G. Roszel's paper on the powers of the General Conference, with the limitations placed on those powers: "The General Conference shall have full powers to make rules and regulations for our Church, under the following restrictions." This is similar to the report of the committee, with the words "canons" and "limitations and" stricken out.

Mr. Roszel's first restriction was the same as the committee's first restriction, with the addition of the words "contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine," so that it read: "The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion, nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine, contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine."

Mr. Roszel's second restriction changed the number proposed as the basis of representation by the committee, and made a sliding scale between five and seven, and was as follows: "They shall not allow of more than one representative for every five members of the Annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every seven."

Mr. Roszel's third restriction was the same as the committee's fourth, namely: "They shall not revoke or change the 'General Rules of the United Societies.'"

His fourth restriction was the same as the committee's fifth, but with the insertion of the word "and" after the word committee. The record in the published Journal reads, "by a committee and of an appeal." Mr. Roszel's reads, "by a committee and of an appeal." The "and," however, was probably omitted unintentionally in the committee's report, or in the report as printed in the published Journal.

Mr. Roszel's fifth restriction was the same as the committee's sixth, but with the transposition of the words supernumerary and superannuated. The committee had the order "traveling, superannuated,

supernumerary, and worn-out preachers," but Mr. Roszel gave that which was a more natural order; namely, "traveling, supernumerary, superannuated, and worn-out preachers;" for the usual course is for the active minister to become a supernumerary minister before he goes on the superannuated list.

Mr. Roszel's provision as to amendments to the restrictions is the same as the proviso presented by the committee.

Then came Daniel Ostrander's provision for calling an extra session of the General Conference, a point for which the committee had made no provision.

At this point the bishop appears to have called attention to a matter mentioned by the committee, but on which the Conference had not taken action.

The Conference had, on motion of Mr. Roszel, agreed that "the next Conference be held on the first day of May, 1812," but no provision was made for subsequent General Conferences or at what interval they should meet. So the bishop's motion that "the General Conference shall meet on the first day of May, once in four years perpetually, at such place or places as shall be fixed on by the General Conference from time to time."

This is the same as the paragraph reported by the committee, with the exception that the words "in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and twelve, and thenceforward on the 1st day of May," were omitted.

At the closing session it appears to have been discovered that on the part of delegates there should

be further qualification than mere membership in an Annual Conference, the only qualification which prior to this had been suggested by either the committee or the Conference.

So, on Joseph Totten's motion, it was agreed that "no preacher shall be sent as a representative to the General Conference until he has traveled at least four full calendar years from the time that he was received on trial by an Annual Conference, and is in full connection at the time of holding the Conference."

If the action of the General Conference be arranged in chronological order, it will give us the following result:

"The General Conference shall be composed of one member for every five members of each Annual Conference."

"Each Annual Conference shall have the power of sending their proportionate number of members to the General Conference, either by seniority or choice, as they shall think best."

"The next General Conference shall be held on the 1st day of May, 1812."

"The next General Conference shall be held in New York."

"It shall take two-thirds of the representatives of all the Annual Conferences to form a quorum for business in the General Conference."

"The next General Conference shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away episcopacy, or to destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency."

"That one of the superintendents preside in the General Conference; but in case of the absence of a superintendent, the Conference shall elect a president *pro tem.*"

"The General Conference shall have full powers to make rules and regulations for our Church under the following restrictions:

"1. The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or

change our articles of religion, nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.

"2. They shall not allow of more than one representative for every five members of the Annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every seven.

"3. They shall not revoke or change the 'General Rules of the United Societies.'

"4. They shall not do away the privileges of our ministers or preachers of trial by a committee, and of an appeal; neither shall they do away the privileges of our members of trial before the society, or by a committee, and of an appeal.

"5. They shall not appropriate the produce of the Book Concern, or of the Charter Fund, to any purpose other than for the benefit of the traveling, supernumerary, superannuated, and worn-out preachers, their wives, widows, and children.

"6. *Provided*, nevertheless, that upon the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions.

"The general superintendents, with or by the advice of all the Annual Conferences, or, if there be no general superintendent, all the Annual Conferences respectively, shall have power to call a General Conference, if they judge it necessary, at any time.

"The General Conference shall meet on the first day of May once in four years, perpetually, at such place or places as shall be fixed on by the General Conference from time to time.

"No preacher shall be sent as a representative to the General Conference until he has traveled at least four full calendar years from the time he was received on trial by an Annual Conference, and is in full connection at the time of holding the Conference."

As far as the Journal shows, this is the way this matter was left by the General Conference of 1808; but it is evident that the chronological order is not

the logical order, and that a better arrangement of the several actions of the General Conference could be made without destroying the intention of the Conference. For example, it is apparent that the resolution forbidding the General Conference to take certain action in regard to the episcopacy was a limitation, and logically belonged to the list of restrictions.

It is also plain that the three separate actions as to the time and place of the next General Conference and the interval between the regular sessions of the General Conference should be combined, and that the other resolutions, agreed to after the adoption of the Restrictive Rules, should be blended with the paragraphs preceding the declaration as to the powers of the General Conference.

The Journal of the General Conference of 1808 does not contain any order to have these changes made; but some one, with or without formal authority, must have edited the several resolutions adopted by the General Conference of that year; for the Discipline of 1808 gives a different arrangement from that which would result from the chronological order.

Though no mention is made in the Journal, it is probable that there was an understanding that some person or persons would group the several actions in a more logical order.

The document appears in the Discipline of 1808 as Question 2, with answers under "Section 3, Of

the General and Yearly Conferences," with the subheading, "Of the General Conference," as follows:

"*Ques.* 2. Who shall compose the General Conference, and what are the regulations and powers belonging to it?

"*Ans.* 1. The General Conference shall be composed of one member for every five members of each Annual Conference, to be appointed either by seniority or choice, at the discretion of such Annual Conference; yet so that such representatives shall have traveled at least four full calendar years from the time that they are received on trial by an Annual Conference, and are in full connection at the time of holding the Conference.

"2. The General Conference shall meet on the first day of May, in the year of our Lord 1812, in the city of New York, and thenceforward on the first day of May once in four years, perpetually, in such place or places as shall be fixed on by the General Conference from time to time. But the general superintendents, with or by the advice of all the Annual Conferences, or, if there be no general superintendent, all the Annual Conferences respectively, shall have power to call a General Conference, if they judge it necessary, at any time.

"3 At all times when the General Conferences meet, it shall take two-thirds of the representatives of all the Annual Conferences to make a quorum for transacting business.

"4. One of the general superintendents shall preside in the General Conference; but in case no general superintendent be present, the General Conference shall choose a president *pro tempore*.

"5. The General Conference shall have full powers to make rules and regulations for our Church, under the following limitations and restrictions, viz.:

"1. The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion, nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.

"2. They shall not allow of more than one representative for every five members of the Annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every seven.

"3. They shall not change nor alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away episcopacy or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency.

"4. They shall not revoke or change the General Rules of the United Societies.

"5. They shall not do away the privileges of our ministers or preachers of trial by a committee, and of an appeal. Neither shall they do away the privileges of our members of trial before the society or by a committee, and of an appeal.

"6. They shall not appropriate the produce of the Book Concern, or of the Charter Fund, to any purpose other than for the benefit of the traveling, supernumerary, superannuated, and worn-out preachers, their wives, widows, and children.

"*Provided*, nevertheless, that upon the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions."

This shows that some editing was done.

The first answer contains a combination of three resolutions, adopted at different times. The precise sense is preserved, as is also the wording, excepting that the resolution, that "each Annual Conference shall have the power of sending their proportionate number of members to the General Conference, either by seniority or choice, as they shall think best," was changed to the words, "to be *appointed* by seniority or choice, at the discretion of such Annual Conference," which may be considered a better phrasing, though the word *appoint* may be open to some criticism.

In the second is a blending of four distinct actions of the General Conference, with an insertion of the phrase, "in the year of our Lord," which was in the report of the committee of fourteen, and the word

"*thenceforward,*" which was evidently put in to make the connection; but, as far as can be learned from the Journal, neither this word nor the phrase alluded to had been adopted by the Conference.

The third—that in reference to a quorum—is considerably varied from the wording of the act of the General Conference, though the sense is preserved. The action of the Conference was as follows: "It shall take two-thirds of the representatives of all the Annual Conferences to form a quorum for business in the General Conference." The form in the Discipline of 1808 is: "At all times when the General Conference is met, it shall take two-thirds of all the representatives of all the Annual Conferences to make a quorum for transacting business." This, as will be seen, is almost the same as the report of the committee of fourteen, which had these words: "At all times when the General Conference is met, it shall take two-thirds of the whole number of delegates to form a quorum."

The fourth is slightly different from the action of the General Conference in several particulars. Instead of "one of the superintendents shall preside," as was passed by the General Conference, it has, "one of the general superintendents shall preside." The act of the General Conference had, "in case of the absence of a superintendent, the Conference shall elect a president *pro tem.;*" but the form put in the Discipline of 1808 has, "in case no general superintendent be present, the General Conference shall choose a president *pro tempore.*"

Here again is seen a leaning toward the report of the committee of fourteen, which used the title "original superintendents" and "general superintendent," and the word "choose," instead of the word "elect," which was the word adopted by the General Conference.

In the fifth, on the powers of the General Conference, the form in the Discipline of 1808 uses the words "limitations and," which words were not in the action of the General Conference, but which were in the report of the committee of fourteen.

The first restriction is precisely as adopted by the General Conference, and so is the second. The third, referring to episcopacy, is the resolution of Jesse Lee, adopted prior to the consideration of Stephen G. Roszel's paper on the powers and restrictions of the General Conference, with a variation which may be deemed of some importance. The form in the Discipline of 1808 begins, "They shall not change or alter any part or rule," etc., "so as to do away episcopacy," etc.; but the form as agreed upon by the Conference was, "The *next General* Conference shall not change," etc.

It is possible, and even probable, that Mr. Roszel had such a restriction in his list of limitations of power, but that he dropped it out because Mr. Lee had anticipated him.

As it was a restriction, there can be no objection to its arrangement among the restrictions and its being placed as third, which was the order in the report of the committee of fourteen. It is, however,

remarkable that the form in the Discipline of 1808 is not the exact wording of the act as passed by the General Conference, but is precisely the same as the report of the committee of fourteen, which was not adopted by the Conference. Whether there is any important legal difference in the form "The *next* General Conference shall not" and "They shall not," may be a question. The form "They shall not" was used, no doubt, to harmonize with the beginning of other restrictions.

The fifth restriction, as in the Discipline of 1808, is the same as adopted by the Conference and the same as reported by the committee. Bangs says[1] that the form adopted used the words "or by a select number," in reference to the trial of a member, whereas the words adopted by the Conference were "or by a committee," which were the same as the report of the committee, and as found in the Discipline of 1808.

The sixth restriction in the form as given in the Discipline of 1808, in regard to the use of the profits of the publishing-house and the income from the Chartered Fund, is precisely the same as that adopted by the Conference and as reported by the committee of fourteen, as is also the provision for amendments. Bangs, however, says the closing words were, "to alter any of the above resolutions;"[2] but the Dis-

[1] N. Bangs, D. D., History of Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. II, p. 238.

[2] N. Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, N. Y., 1853, 3d Ed., p. 233.

cipline of 1808 uses the word "restrictions." The same author, in introducing the action of the General Conference of 1808, uses this language, after referring to the rejection of the committee's report: "Further consultation," "issued finally in the adoption, almost unanimously, of the following regulations and limitations." [1]

The Rev. Jesse Lee appears to have been very much pleased with this new arrangement. Commenting upon it, he says:

"Our Connection having spread very extensively, and the number of our preachers being much larger than they were formerly, it was thought best to make some new regulations about our General Conferences in future, and the foregoing regulations were agreed to, by which means each part of the Connection would have a proportionable number of preachers in the General Conference. The Baltimore and Philadelphia Conferences will no longer include more than half the members of the General Conference." [2]

The Rev. Nathan Bangs, D. D., who was a minister at that time, and whose history was issued in 1838, thus refers to this change in the General Conference:

"The unanimity with which these restrictive regulations were adopted by the Conference shows the deep sense which was very generally felt of the propriety of limiting the powers of the General Conference, so as to secure forever the essential doctrines of Christianity from all encroachments, as well as those rules of moral conduct, so succinctly and precisely embodied in the General Rules, and also to prevent the appropriations of the available funds of the Church from being

[1] N. Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, N Y, 1853, 3d Ed., p. 231.

[2] Rev. Jesse Lee, History of the Methodists. 1810, pp. 349, 350.

diverted to other objects than those for which they had been established. Call these rules, therefore, *restrictive regulations*, or a *constitution of the Church*—for we contend not about names merely—they have ever since been considered as sacredly binding upon all succeeding General Conferences, limiting them in all their legislative acts, and prohibiting them from making inroads upon the doctrines, general rules, and government of the Church.

"Before this, each General Conference felt itself at full liberty, not being prohibited by any standing laws, to make whatever alterations it might see fit, or to introduce any new doctrine or item of discipline which either fancy, inclination, discretion, or indiscretion might dictate.

"Under this state of things, knowing the rage of man for novelty, and witnessing the destructive changes which have frequently laid waste churches, by removing ancient landmarks, and so modifying doctrines and usages as to suit the temper of the times, or to gratify either a corrupt taste or a perverse disposition, many had felt uneasy apprehensions for the safety and unity of the Church and the stability of its doctrines, moral discipline, and the frame of its government; and none were more solicitous upon this subject than Bishop Asbury, who had labored so long with an assiduity equaled by few, if indeed any, and suffered so much for the propagation and establishing of these important points; he therefore greatly desired, before he should be called hence, to see them fixed upon a permanent foundation. The lively satisfaction, too, with which this act of the Conference was received generally, both by ministers and people, abundantly proves the wisdom which presided in that Council, which devised these resolutions, and applauds the prudence and caution with which they were so cordially adopted. And although the progress of events has dictated the expediency of some modification in the iron-like bond of the proviso, yet time and experience have borne a faithful testimony to the salutary influence of the restrictions themselves on the peace and unity of the Church."[1]

[1] N. Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1853, 3d Ed., Vol. II, pp. 233, 234.

Establishing the delegated General Conference marks a new epoch in the development of Conference government in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

From personal government the Church has passed to government by the Conference, and Conference government has passed through three stages,—first, government in the body of the ministry in the Annual Conferences; second, government in the Quadrennial General Conference; and now, government in the delegated Quadrennial General Conference.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NATURE AND POWER OF THE DELEGATED GENERAL CONFERENCE.

BISHOP ASBURY'S reference to the General Conference of 1808 is very meager. Under date of May 6, 1808, he says: "Our General Conference opened in peace. On Saturday one hundred and twenty-nine members took their seats. The new Church in Eutaw Street was opened on the Sabbath day, and I gave a discourse on the occasion from 2 Cor. iii, 12. On the 26th the Conference rose. We have done very little except making the rule for representation hereafter; one member to the General Conference for every six members of the Annual Conferences, and the electing dear Brother McKendree assistant bishop; the burden is now borne by two pairs of shoulders instead of one, the care is cast upon two hearts and heads." [1]

This note is singular in three respects: First, it states that the General Conference did "very little except making the rule for representation," whereas it did an exceedingly important work in determining the powers and limitation of powers in the delegated General Conference; secondly, he states that the ratio was one delegate for six members of the Annual Con-

[1] Bishop Asbury's Journal, 1821, Vol. III, p. 243.

ference, whereas the Conference decided on one for five, but gave the delegated General Conference power to fix the ratio within the limits of one in five to one in seven; and, thirdly, the entry is somewhat remarkable in that it styles Bishop McKendree an "assistant bishop."

We leave these singular statements, and pass on to notice the nature and power of this delegated General Conference.

To ascertain its nature and its powers, we must refer to the instrument drawn up by the General Conference of 1808, which at that time represented the whole Church, and was the supreme governing body of the Church.

That instrument, which has already been quoted, appeared in the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1808, immediately after the Articles of Religion, as Question Second and answer to said question under the general heading: "Section III. Of the General and Yearly Conferences."

This document is of the nature of a charter or constitution created and granted by the creative and superior authority. The General Conference of 1808, representing the Church and exercising supreme ecclesiastical control, created the delegated General Conference, and in the written instrument to which reference has been made, recited that which it deemed necessary to bring into being and perpetuate the delegated General Conference, and also indicated in specific terms the scope of its power.

To ascertain, therefore, the nature and power of

this new General Conference, we must consider the document drawn up by the General Conference of 1808, and the whole matter resolves itself into a question as to the interpretation of that instrument.

An examination of the instrument will show that, as to the nature of the new General Conference, it was to be,—

First, a ministerial body. No one could be a member who was not a minister in full membership in an Annual Conference at the time of holding the General Conference, and who had not been a minister at least four full calendar years from the time he had been received on probation in an Annual Conference.

Secondly, it was to be a delegated body, and not, as heretofore, with membership dependent merely upon ministerial standing; but persons having that particular ministerial status were to be selected or elected "either by seniority or choice." That is to say, the Annual Conference could decide whether it would select the oldest preachers, or whether it would elect by vote those who should be its representatives. Further, the number of delegates from any Annual Conference was to be in proportion to the number of members in the said Annual Conference.

The adoption of the Constitution of 1808 changed the status of the bishops in subsequent General Conferences. None were to be members of the delegated General Conference, but delegates elected by Annual Conferences. As the bishops were not so elected, they had not the rights of members on the floor, but were, under the provisions of the Constitution, to

act as presidents, with power to rule on points of parliamentary law, but not to decide points of ecclesiastical law; for the General Conference was to be the interpreter as well as the maker of Church law. This relation of the general superintendents to the General Conference has been respected by bishops, and jealously guarded by General Conferences, as the records show.[1]

Thirdly, it was to be a law-making body. It was to have power "to make rules and regulations" for the Church. This language covers the enactment of laws and directions for carrying out these laws, and also of any direction which might be deemed necessary in the conduct of the Church.

In order that there might be no mistake as to the scope of this power granted to the delegated General Conference, the instrument specifically states that "The General Conference shall have full powers to make rules and regulations for our Church."

So that the whole law-making power was now committed to the General Conference, and would no longer be in the Annual Conferences or in the body of the ministry, either in the separate yearly Conferences or in the general ministry assembled at one time and in one place. If the document said no more, it would be plain that the delegated General Conference could do as it pleased in the matter of making "rules and regulations;" but the new General Conference was not so empowered. The body that created it

[1] For example, see General Conference Journal of 1884, p. 263.

and gave it the written instrument, as its authority and its guide, inserted in the document a check or a series of checks upon this power "to make rules and regulations" by adding the words, "under the following limitations and restrictions."

Then follow six paragraphs, which afterward were commonly knows as "The Six Restrictive Rules." These restrictions touch questions of doctrine, the ratio of representation, episcopacy, the "General Rules," the rights of ministers and members to legal protection in their status as ministers or members, and the use of the income from the publishing interests and the "Chartered Fund;" and then is added a provision for amendment.

As to the matter of law-making, it is therefore perfectly plain that the new delegated General Conference had full power to make all "rules and regulations" that it thought might be requisite for the proper conduct of the Church, excepting where checked by one or more of the specified limitations. In other words, the General Conference had full power to make any law or regulation which was not prohibited by one or more of the "Restrictive Rules."

So Bishop Harris, in his little book on "The Constitutional Powers of the General Conference," says:

"It will be seen that the General Conference has, by express constitutional grant, power to make rules and regulations for the Church, subject, however, to a code or body of articles, six in number, which are called '*Restrictive Rules, or Articles.*' In other words, the General Conference has legislative powers

conferred on it by a constitution restricting and limiting its powers."[1]

Again the same author observes:

"The constitution of the Church differs essentially, in the powers it delegates, from our State and Federal constitutions. In these latter all powers not expressly granted to the Government are reserved to the people, or to the States, while in the former all powers not expressly reserved or excepted are delegated to the General Conference. It has been so held by the highest judicial tribunal of the Church,[2] as well as by the Supreme Court of the Nation.[3] The constitution gives to the General Conference *full powers* to make rules and regulations under defined limitations—power to make *all* rules and regulations pertinent to Church government, under *specified* restrictions, and under no other restrictions. There is not here a delegation of enumerated powers accompanied by a general reservation as in the case of the Federal Government, but a delegation of general and sweeping powers under enumerated and well defined restrictions. The whole power to rule and regulate the Church is given to the General Conference by the plain terms of the grant, and is to be held as restricted only in those particulars in which it was designed not to delegate the power. In what particulars it was designed not to delegate the power must be determined by the terms of the constitution. No limitations can be implied other than those assigned in the instrument itself."[4]

The same writer further remarks, that

"The General Conference was at first composed of all the preachers in good standing in the yearly Conferences. Afterward membership was restricted to ministers who had been

[1] Rev. Wm. L. Harris, D. D., The Constitutional Powers of the General Conference, with a Special Application to the Subject of Slaveholding, Cincinnati, 1860, p. 20.

[2] Reply to the Protest, Journal of General Conference of 1844, pp. 203, 204.

[3] Howard's Reports United States Supreme Court, Vol. XVI, p. 308.

[4] Rev. Wm. L. Harris, D. D., The Constitutional Powers of the General Conference, 1860, pp. 21-23.

connected with the Annual Conferences four full calendar years. The General Conference was thus constituted up to and including the one held in Baltimore in 1808. No rule or regulation passed by this body was unconstitutional, for the very good reason that there was no constitution, in the sense of that term as now understood and used by our Church authorities. Its powers to make rules and regulations for the Church were undefined and unlimited. It had 'full powers' in all matters pertinent to Church government, and was amenable for its action to no earthly tribunal.

"The General Conference of 1808 provided, that thereafter this supreme council of the Church should be composed of delegates chosen by the Annual Conferences severally, according to a given ratio of representation. The first delegated General Conference met in New York, in 1812. It was the legitimate successor of the one of 1808, and it succeeded to all the powers of its predecessors, except in so far as those powers were pared down by the limiting terms of the constitution.

"To ascertain, therefore, the powers of the General Conference in a given case, no search need be made for a specific warrant for the particular rule which it is proposed to enact. It is enough that the constitution does not forbid the rule; for the terms of the grant devolving legislative power upon the General Conference are sufficiently comprehensive to authorize the passage of any rule not clearly excepted by the enumerated restrictions."[1]

The phrase "rules and regulations" hardly needs any explanation. It is so comprehensive that it covers everything that a body possessing supreme legislative, judicial, and executive powers can do. The words "rule" and "rules" were used in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1808 and in the years preceding, as meaning "law" and "laws," and "regulations" covered all directions which might be made to carry forward the work of the Church; and so, under

[1] Rev. Wm. L. Harris, D. D., The Constitutional Powers of the General Conference, 1880, pp. 23-25.

the phrase "rules and regulations," every minister, every member, every officer, every society, and every Conference in the Church was brought under the direct or indirect control of the General Conference according to its pleasure, except as limited by the Restrictive Rules.

The same words are used in Article IV of the Constitution of the United States, where, referring to the power of Congress over the Territories, it says: "The Congress shall have power to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the Territory," etc.; and Chief Justice Story, commenting on this clause of the Constitution, says: "The power of Congress over the public territory is clearly exclusive and universal, and their *legislation* is subject to no control."[1]

In the same way the General Conference, under the unlimited grant of power, would have exclusive power and be subject to no control; but the "full powers" are limited by the restrictions; yet, as long as it does not trespass beyond the limits placed by the restrictions, it has "full powers to make rules and regulations" according to its wisdom or pleasure. In other words, the power of the General Conference was unlimited within certain limits.

Fourthly, the General Conference was to be, in a secondary and limited sense, a constitution-making body. Of itself it could not make or originate any change in the constitution. The body of ministers, as in the General Conference of 1808 and in the An-

[1] Story on the Constitution, Vol. II, p. 189.

nual Conferences, reserved this initiative in the matter of constitution-making.

Thus, the constitution granted, the first delegated General Conference closes with the following provision for amendment: "Provided, nevertheless, that upon the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions."[1]

According to this, any or all of the restrictions might be amended or stricken out, and then the General Conference would be free to act as it might desire, without any limitation. But the General Conference alone could not free itself from the limitations; and, as has been observed, could not even take the first step toward the change.

The initiative had to be taken by the body of the ministry prior to the assembling of a General Conference; and that not by the body of the ministry collected in the same place and at the same time, but meeting in their several Annual Conferences, and voting therein.

The proposed change must first pass around the several Annual Conferences, where it must receive, not a majority vote of all the members of all the Annual Conferences or of all those present and voting, but the recommendation of all the Annual Conferences, and that by a majority vote in each Annual Conference. Thus it might happen that though a majority of the aggregate membership of

[1] Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1808, p. 16.

the Annual Conferences might favor the change, yet because there was not a majority in a single small Conference, the change could not be made.

If, however, there was a majority vote in favor in each Annual Conference, then the recommendation for some given change could be considered and acted upon by the next succeeding General Conference. This gave the General Conference supplementary and concurrent power in amending the constitution; but it reserved to the body of the ministry in the several Annual Conferences the fundamental right of constitution-mending, as it had the original right of constitution-making.

When the ministry in the Annual Conferences had, according to the provision for amendment, expressed their desire for any specified change, then the next succeeding General Conference must agree to the change by a two-thirds vote before the change could be made in the constitution. If the amendment received less than a two-thirds vote, the proposition fell just as certainly as though the Annual Conferences themselves had refused to recommend.

Thus the constitution-mending and constitution-making power was divided between the ministry in the Annual Conferences and their delegates in General Conference assembled, but with the originating power reserved to the Annual Conferences.

There can, therefore, be no doubt as to the method to be used in removing or amending any of the Six Restrictive Rules; but a question now arises as to whether that method refers only to the part of

the instrument technically known as "the Six Restrictive Rules," or whether this process of amendment is necessary in making changes in any other part of the document. In other words, could the delegated General Conference, acting under the constitution of 1808, change any other part of the instrument by its own act, without any reference to a "joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences?"

There is one part in the body of the document which the General Conference appears to have the right to change without waiting for a "joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences," and that is the item in the first paragraph, where it says "the General Conference shall be composed of one member for every five members of each Annual Conference;" for the Second Restrictive Rule established a sliding scale of representation. It reads: "They shall not allow of more than one representative for every five members of the Annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every seven."[1]

According to this the delegated General Conference of 1812 could have changed the ratio of representation so that there might have been one delegate for six or one for seven members, and might have changed the language in the first paragraph so as to harmonize, by striking out five and inserting six or seven, without awaiting a new recommendation from the Annual Conferences; but it will be seen that the delegated General Conference had already been em-

[1] Discipline of 1808.

powered to make these changes by the General Conference of 1808, so that such change would not be the act of the General Conference alone, for there had been the previous consent of the body of the ministry.

Still the question arises, Can the General Conference, on its own motion, make any other change in the body of the constitution? In answer to this it must be said that the instrument itself does not specify any other change the General Conference may make in the body of the constitution, and the natural inference therefore would be that the General Conference would not have the power unless the instrument gave it such power in specific terms.

Something may depend upon the interpretation of the words "any of the above restrictions," in the provision for amendment, as to whether the language covers only the Six Restrictive Rules, so-called, or whether it covers the whole document.

If the provision for amendment covers only the above Restrictive Rules, then it might be held that there is no provision for the amendment of the body of the instrument, and, if that be the case, then it follows that the body of the ministers in the General Conference of 1808 did not transfer to the delegated General Conference any power whatever to change the body of the instrument, excepting in the one minor part before mentioned; and it may be held that, as the creating body did not give the created body such power, the delegated General Conference did not possess such power; for it had only such

power as was given it by the General Conference of 1808.

If, however, we interpret the provision for amendment as applying to the whole instrument, then it must again follow that the General Conference of itself can not change the body of the Constitution unless there was first "the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences."

An analysis of the instrument of 1808 shows us that the whole of it is of the nature of a charter or constitution. It was all given by the then supreme power, and the whole document was necessary to bring into being and to perpetuate the delegated General Conference. The entire instrument, including the statements as to the composition of the body, the time and place of meeting, the presidency, the quorum, and the calling of extra sessions, are as much parts of the charter or constitution as the part which refers to the power of the General Conference to make rules and regulations or the restrictions upon these powers. The delegated General Conference did not make the body of the instrument any more than it made the Restrictive Rules; and it must follow that it has, to say the least, no more power over the body of the constitution than it has over the Restrictive Rules, unless the instrument clearly gives it such power; and that it does not confer such power is plain.

The delegated General Conference did not make the instrument, but the instrument made it, and, on general principles, the created can not make or unmake the creator.

If the whole instrument be of the nature of a charter or constitution, it follows that the constitution of the General Conference can only be changed by the power that made the constitution, or in the way specified by that power.

It must, therefore, appear that the whole constitution of 1808 was as thoroughly protected against change by the General Conference alone as were the Restrictive Rules; and certainly, if a subordinate part of the constitution was guarded by the provision for amendment, the more important body of the instrument was at least as strongly defended.

If the General Conference could amend the body of the constitution by striking out or inserting, or otherwise without action on the part of the Annual Conferences, it might destroy its presidency and its quorum. It might decide to meet once in four hundred years instead of "once in four years perpetually," and so practically destroy itself. These matters are vital, and are under the control of the constitution-making and constitution-mending power, and by the instrument of 1808 that was divided between the Annual Conferences and their delegates in the General Conference.

It appears, therefore, that the body of the constitution can not be amended by the General Conference alone, and that, under the provision of 1808, there was no easier way of amending the body of the instrument than the process for amending a Restrictive Rule; namely, that it was necessary, first, to have "the joint recommendation of all the Annual

Conferences," and then the concurrence of "a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding."

Thus we have seen that the delegated General Conference, provided for by the act of the General Conference of 1808, was to be a ministerial body composed of a proportionate number of ministerial delegates from the Annual Conference, that it was to be the law-making body of the Church, that it was to have a supplementary or concurrent share in the constitution-making power, and that it was to exist and act under a constitution of which no part could be changed except by compliance with the process laid down by the power that created the constitution, and that this process required the recommendation of all the Annual Conferences, and then the concurrence of the General Conference.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE FROM 1812 TO 1856.

THE first delegated General Conference met in 1812, in pursuance of the action of the General Conference of 1808. The Journal of the General Conference of 1812 opens with the statement that "the delegated General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America assembled in the city of New York, agreeably to a resolution of the General Conference of 1808. Bishop Asbury opened the Conference. Wm. M. Kennedy was appointed secretary *pro tem.* The forenoon was occupied in calling for and reading the certificates of the delegates from the several Annual Conferences."[1]

On the afternoon of the first day the right of an Annual Conference to elect reserve delegates was considered. "A case was brought forward respecting some of the delegates from New England. It seems they elected three extra members, who were to succeed and take place in case of the failure of any of the first chosen delegates. The Conference took into consideration the propriety of the principle, and, after some debate, voted that this business should be laid over till to-morrow."[2]

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 97. [2] *Id.*, p. 98.

The Journal for the next day informs us that "the business concerning the delegates from the New England Conference was resumed, and, after some conversation, a motion was made: 'Are our brethren from the New England Conference, Joel Winch and Daniel Webb, entitled to their seats in this Conference?' Voted in favor of the motion, 56; against, 22. They accordingly took their seats in the places of John Brodhead and Elijah R. Sabin;"[1] and so the principle of alternate delegates was established.

On May 5th the General Conference considered the question of "rules and orders to govern the Conference," and especially the right of the body to resolve itself into "the Committee of the Whole Conference," and on the question, "Shall the Conference have power to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole?" the Conference decided, "by a large majority," that it had such power.[2]

The next day, on motion of S. G. Roszel, Bishop McKendree's address was considered in Committee of the Whole Conference, and "Freeborn Garrettson was called to the chair."[3]

On the afternoon of May 8th, "Jesse Lee moved that the members of the next General Conference come by seniority, and that the supernumerary and superannuated preachers shall not be included among the senior preachers; also that one for every six members shall come to the next General Conference, and, in case there are two or more preachers of equal

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, pp. 98, 99.
[2] *Id.*, p. 100. [3] *Id.*, p. 101.

standing, then the first named shall have the preference. And in case any one of the above preachers shall fail, by sickness or otherwise, to attend the General Conference, then the next senior preacher shall come in his place. Postponed till Wednesday next."[1]

The final action on this proposition is as follows: "Then the question was taken on the first paragraph: 'I move that the members of the next General Conference come by seniority.' Lost. The second paragraph: 'That one for every six members shall come to the next General Conference.' Lost."[2] So the first attempt to amend the plan of 1808 failed.

Lee's motion, however, was not an amendment to the constitution. The first part was rather in the line of interpretation, or an expression of judgment. The change of ratio to one in six was permitted by the constitution. The latter part of the resolution was an attempt to provide a class of reserve delegates.

As already noted, there was one change the General Conference was permitted to make; namely, the fixing the ratio of representation at or between the limits of one for five to one for seven.

The first recorded change in the chapter on the General Conference was made in 1816, when the General Conference changed the ratio to one in seven, by adopting the following:

"*Resolved*, That the next General Conference shall be composed of one member for every seven, instead of one for every six of each Annual Conference."[3]

[1] Gen. Con. Journals, Vol. I, p. 105. [2] *Id.*, p. 111. [3] *Id.*, p. 137.

This appears to imply that in 1816 the ratio of representation was one in six, though we fail to find a record of such a change.

As we have seen, this change to one for every seven members was within the powers granted to the delegated General Conference by the General Conference of 1808, which had adopted a sliding scale of one in five to one in seven. In 1828 a slight change was made in the Sixth Restrictive Rule by substituting the word "nor" for the word "or," so as to make it read "shall not appropriate the produce of the Book Concern nor of the Charter Fund."

This may have been done to prevent the possibility of people supposing that the Book Concern and Charter Fund were two titles for the same thing.

There is no evidence, however, in the Journal of the General Conference that this change was authorized or formally agreed to by that body. Certainly it was not submitted to the Annual Conferences. It was probably purely a matter of editing; but the question may be raised as to whether an editor, or even the General Conference, had any right to change any considerable part or even a single expression in the constitution prepared by the General Conference of 1808.

To this there is only one answer; namely, that the General Conference, much less an editor, had no right to change a word or phrase except as the constitution provided.

After the General Conference of 1824, an effort was made to reduce the ratio of representation; but it failed.

Bangs says: "A recommendation had been sent the rounds of the Annual Conferences, requesting them to empower the General Conference of 1828 to diminish the number of delegates. This recommendation passed all the Annual Conferences except the Philadelphia, and as it required *all* the Conferences to concur before the alteration could be made by the General Conference, the measure was defeated by the non-concurrence of this single Annual Conference."[1] The pressure, however, led to subsequent action.

In the General Conference of 1828, Wilbur Fisk, on the 15th of May, offered the following resolutions, viz.:

"*Resolved*, etc., 1. That this General Conference respectfully suggest to the several Annual Conferences the propriety of recommending to the next General Conference so to alter and amend the rules of our Discipline, by which the General Conference is restricted and limited in its legislative powers, commonly called the Restrictive Rules, number six, as to read thus: *Provided*, nevertheless, that upon the joint recommendation of three-fourths of all the Annual Conferences, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions; or, whenever such alterations shall have been first recommended by two-thirds of the General Conference, then, so soon as three-fourths of said Annual Conferences shall have concurred with such recommendations, such alteration or alterations shall take effect.

"*Resolved*, etc., 2. That it is hereby made the duty of the several bishops in their tours to the different Annual Conferences, to carry around and lay before any such Annual Conference which they may visit respectively any address or resolution, or other papers of a decent character, which this

[1] Nathan Bangs, D. D., History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1857, Vol. IV, p. 103.

General Conference or any Annual Conference may request them so to carry around to obtain the opinion or decision of said Annual Conferences thereon. Signed, Wilbur Fisk, Joseph A. Merrill."

"These resolutions were, on motion, laid on the table."[1]

On the 21st of May (1828), and on motion of William Winans, Wilbur Fisk's resolution was "called up."[2]

"L. McCombs moved to amend the resolution by striking out the word 'joint,' and insert the word 'concurrent,' and the motion was lost."[3]

"A division of the motion was called for. The first part of the resolution was adopted, to wit: 'That this General Conference respectfully suggest to the several Annual Conferences the propriety of recommending to the next General Conference so to alter and amend the rules of our Discipline, by which the General Conference is restricted and limited in its powers to make rules and regulations for our Church, commonly called the Restrictive Rules, so as to make the proviso at the close of said Restrictive Rules, No. 6, read thus: *Provided*, nevertheless, that upon the joint recommendations of three-fourths of all the Annual Conferences, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions except the first 'Article.'"

It will be seen that this was really a substitute for the first part of Dr. Fisk's first resolution. Fisk used the words, "its legislative powers;" this substitutes the words, "its powers to make rules and regulations for our Church,"—an evident attempt to repeat and preserve the language of the paragraph on the powers of the General Conference, which gives it more than mere "legislative powers."

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, pp. 331-332.
[2] *Id.*, p. 346. [3] *Ibid.*

There are other slight differences of phraseology, but the most important change is the addition of the words, "except the first 'Article,'" which no doubt means the First Restrictive Rule, limiting the power as to change of doctrine.

"The motion by which this part of the resolution was adopted, was, on motion of R. Bigelow reconsidered. It was then resolved, on motion, that the resolution be referred to a select committee of three members."[1]

On May 22, 1828,—"W. Fisk, from the committee to which had been referred the subject of recommending to the Annual Conferences some alterations in the Restrictive Rules, reported."[2]

"A division of the above report was called for, and the question being taken on the first part, it was carried.

"The vote was taken on the second and last part; carried, also."[3]

The following is the report as adopted: "The committee to whom was referred the subject embraced in a resolution suggesting the propriety of providing for the alteration of one of the rules commonly called the Restrictive Rules, beg leave to report the following resolution:

"*Resolved*, That this General Conference respectfully suggest to the several Annual Conferences the propriety of recommending to the next General Conference so to alter and amend the rules of our Discipline, by which the General Conference is restricted in its powers to make rules and regulations for

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 346.
[2] *Id.*, p. 353. [3] *Ibid.*

the Church, commonly called the Restrictive Rules, as to make the proviso at the close of said Restrictive Rules, No. 6, read thus:

"*Provided*, nevertheless, that upon the concurrent recommendation of three-fourths of all the members of the several Annual Conferences who shall be present and vote on such recommendation, then a majority of two thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of such regulations, excepting the First Article.

"And, also, whenever such alteration or alterations shall have first been recommended by two-thirds of the General Conference, so soon as three-fourths of the members of the Annual Conferences shall have concurred, as aforesaid, with such recommendation, such alteration or alterations shall take effect.

"All of which is respectfully submitted.

"W. FISK, Chairman."[1]

It will be seen that the word "limited," which appears in the resolution adopted (May 21st) and committed, and also in Dr. Fisk's paper, was stricken out from the phrase, "restricted and limited"—probably on the ground that it was tautological and unnecessary.

The phrase "so as," which appears in the resolution which had been adopted, and then reconsidered and referred, was made to read "as," which was the form in Dr. Fisk's resolution.

The phrase, "the above restrictions," which appeared in Dr. Fisk's paper and the resolution which had been reconsidered, was stricken out, and the words, "such regulations," were inserted.

"Excepting" was substituted for "except."

But the most important change was the insertion

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, pp. 353, 354.

of the words, "the members of." The wording had been, "three-fourths of all the Annual Conferences." This insertion made it read, "three-fourths of all the members of the several Annual Conferences." This was proposing a new principle; for the proviso in the Discipline read, and had read since 1808, "upon the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences."

Under the original proviso it required a majority vote in each and all the several Annual Conferences; but this proposition was to put the power in the hands of the aggregate membership of the Annual Conferences.

In order that it might not be supposed to require three-fourths of all the members, whether present or not, or who did or did not vote, there were added the words, "who shall be present and vote on such recommendation."

Then the second part was made to begin with the words, "and also," instead of "or," as Dr. Fisk had originally proposed.

"Have been first" was changed to "have first been." The aggregate vote of the ministers was also incorporated by inserting the words, "three-fourths of the members of the Annual Conferences shall have concurred, as aforesaid." The singular, "recommendation," was also substituted for "recommendations," as in Dr. Fisk's original resolution.

This "second part," as it was termed, was also a new and important proposition. Up to this time every change in the restrictions had to originate with

the Annual Conferences, and by them be sent to the General Conference for concurrence. This new proposition was intended to permit the General Conference to take the initiative; and as soon as "three-fourths of all the members of the several Annual Conferences who shall be present and vote on such recommendation" concur, the change would be made.

The new proposition was also remarkable in another particular; namely, the effort to make it exceedingly difficult to change the First Restrictive Rule, which refers to the Articles of Religion, or doctrines of the Church.

The resolution directing the bishops to submit measures to the several Annual Conferences, appears to have been dropped.

Thus the General Conference of 1828 suggested to the several Annual Conferences the propriety of recommending to the next General Conference an amendment to the proviso in regard to making changes in the restrictions. As decided by the General Conference of 1808, the proposition for change had to originate in the Annual Conferences. The proposed amendment, however, would permit it to originate either in the General or Annual Conferences. The act of 1808 required the agreement of all the Annual Conferences; but the new proposition would require a three-fourths vote of all the members of the Annual Conferences present and voting. If adopted, the Annual Conference would cease to be a unit of power, and the power would be placed in the aggregate membership of all the Annual Conferences.

The proposed change in the provision for amendments to the constitution was submitted to the several Annual Conferences after the adjournment of the General Conference of 1828, and the matter again came up in the General Conference of 1832.

The Journal of this Conference opens with the declaration that "at a General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, began and held in the city of Philadelphia, on Tuesday, May 1, 1832, the Rev. Joshua Soule and the Rev. Elijah Hedding, two of the bishops of said Church, being present, Bishop Soule opened the Conference by reading a portion of the Holy Scriptures, singing, and prayer."[1]

On the first day of the session of the General Conference of 1832 it was, on motion of John Earley,

"*Resolved*, That a committee of five members be appointed, to be denominated 'The Committee on Privileges and Elections,' to whom shall be referred all matters relating to the election of members to this General Conference, to examine and report thereon."[2]

On Saturday, May 12th, the above committee reported as follows:

"The Committee on Elections beg leave to report, that whereas there has not been anything particularly referred to them, that they have barely inquired into the legality of the delegation composing this General Conference, and find nothing incorrect. Your committee find, however, that some of the Annual Conferences have been, and still are, in the habit of choosing supernumeraries, or delegates in reserve, so as to

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 361. [2] *Id.*, p. 364.

have their proper ratio; but as usage has established the principle, we do not deem it expedient to make any rule on the subject."

"And, on motion, the Conference concurred therein."[1]

On the 7th of May the Committee on Itinerancy reported the result of the vote in the several Annual Conferences upon the Amendment to the Constitution, submitted by the previous General Conference of 1828.

The Journal of the General Conference of 1832 has the following account:

"The Committee on Itinerancy reported that, on examination of the Journals of all the Annual Conferences respecting the alteration of the restrictive regulations, as recommended by the General Conference of 1828, we find that the subject was taken up by the New York Annual Conference, and concurred in by seventy-two votes against two—once resolutions were passed inviting the several Annual Conferences to concur in the same—which resolutions have passed all the Annual Conferences in full and due form, with the exception of the Illinois, where we find some want in the formality; not sufficient, however, in the judgment of your committee, to alter or set aside the principle. And we have the assurance of the delegates from that Conference that the informality arose from the want of information, and not with any intention to embarrass the true design of the said resolution. Your committee therefore offer the following resolution to the Conference, viz.:

"*Resolved*, by the delegates of the Annual Conferences in General Conference assembled, That the proviso at the close of the article numbered six of the Restrictive Rules (see Discipline, chapter i, section 3, page 21) be altered so as to read: 'Provided, nevertheless, that upon the concurrent recommendation of three-fourths of all the mem-

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 386.

bers of the several Annual Conferences, who shall be present and vote on such recommendation, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions, excepting the first article; and also, whenever such alteration or alterations shall have been first recommended by two-thirds of the General Conference, so soon as three-fourths of the members of all the Annual Conferences shall have concurred as aforesaid, such alteration or alterations shall take effect.' Signed, L. Clark, Chairman."[1]

This was made the order of the day for Wednesday, the 9th of May.[2]

The report did not get before the house on the 9th, but was considered on the 10th of May.

The Journal informs us that "the report of the Committee on the Itinerancy, presented on Monday morning last and laid on the table, was called up and read, after which the delegates from Illinois gave the following assurance in writing, viz.:

"We, the delegates from the Illinois Annual Conference, do hereby certify that we all do cordially concur in the above assurance.

SAMUEL H. THOMPSON,
C. W. RUTER,
JAMES ARMSTRONG,
ALLEN WILEY,
GEORGE LOCKE,
WILLIAM SHANK,
THOMAS S. HITT."

"The Conference then proceeded to act upon the report, and, on putting the question, the preamble was adopted unanimously. The first resolution (the one in question) was adopted unanimously."[3]

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, pp. 377, 378. [2] *Id.*, p. 378.
[3] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, pp. 382, 383.

The Journal of the General Conference of 1832 does not throw any light upon the asserted informality in the case of the Illinois Conference. If it was a fact that the Illinois Conference agreed to the change, and the informality did not neutralize that agreement, and if all the other Annual Conferences had agreed to the amendment, as the committee declared, then it was regularly before the General Conference for its concurrence by a two-thirds vote. If, however, the Illinois Conference had not agreed, the proposition had not, as the law required, received "the joint recommendation of all the Annual Conferences," and was not regularly before the General Conference.

But we must keep in mind the fact that the committee pronounces "the informality not sufficient to alter or set aside the principle," and that the committee of the General Conference and the delegates from the Illinois Conference declared "the informality rose from the want of information," and not from "any intention to embarrass the true design of the said resolution."

But a remarkable fact in this connection is the declaration of the present secretary of the Illinois Conference that the Journal of that Conference does not show that the Illinois Conference took any action whatsoever upon the proposed amendment to the constitution.

In order to ascertain the nature of the informality in the action of the Illinois Conference upon this amendment, the author communicated with the

Rev. Christian Galeener, the secretary of the above Conference, and requested him to examine the Journal. The secretary, under date of January 9, 1891, answered as follows: "After a careful scrutiny of the Journals of the Illinois Conference, I am convinced that no such action as that to which you refer was ever journalized."

The records of the Illinois Conference therefore afford no proof that the Conference ever voted on this change in the constitution. If the Illinois Conference had not agreed to the proposed change, then the General Conference of 1832 had no right to adopt the amendment and insert the new provision in the constitution, but the fact that there is no record of action in the Illinois Conference is not conclusive proof that there was no action, for the secretary might have unintentionally omitted the mention. This may be considered improbable, and yet we must give weight to the declaration of the delegates from the Illinois Conference in the General Conference of 1832, and to the statement of the committee which reported upon the matter. They understood the facts better than we can at this distant day. If, however, any taint of illegality existed at that time, it may be considered as having passed away, as there is no record of any exception having been taken at that time, and no objection has been filed since that date, a period of nearly sixty years.

A careful comparison will show that the proviso as presented in the committee's report is not precisely the same as the one passed by the General Con-

ference of 1828 as a recommendation to the Annual Conferences. The proviso in the committee's report has the words "any of the above restrictions;" whereas that agreed to by the General Conference of 1828 had "any of such regulations." In the second part the committee's proviso has "three-fourths of the members of all the Annual Conferences," but the word "all" was not in the proviso agreed upon in 1828. The committee has "shall have concurred as aforesaid, such alteration or alterations shall take effect," while the General Conference of 1828 had "shall have concurred, as aforesaid, with such recommendation, such alteration or alterations shall take effect."

The introduction of the word "all" was an improvement, as it gave the part greater clearness, but the substitution of the words "any of the above restrictions" for "any of such regulations," might be supposed by some to limit amendment merely to what are called the Restrictive Rules, while the other phrase might be construed as intended to cover all the regulations for the General Conference that had been decided upon by the General Conference of 1808. But as we have already seen, even the word "restrictions" must be construed as covering the entire instrument.

The minor changes to which we have referred are more interesting than material in a legal sense or as matters of practical value; for the important question is not what the General Conference of 1828 suggested, but upon what the Annual Conferences voted,

and what the General Conference of 1832 concurred in; and we must conclude that the form as reported by the committee, and adopted unanimously by the General Conference of 1832, was the form voted upon by the Annual Conferences. Yet it may be asked, who presumed to alter the proposition of 1828, even in the slightest particular?

The effect of the vote in the Annual Conferences, and the concurrence of the General Conference, was to substitute the new provision for amendments to the constitution for the one which had stood since 1808, a period of twenty-four years.

The new proviso, as in the report of the above committee and in the Discipline of 1832, allowed an amendment to be passed by the General Conference and then concurred in by the members of the Annual Conferences, or it might originate in an Annual Conference, be passed from Conference to Conference, and be agreed to by three-fourths of those voting in the Annual Conferences, and then be passed by a two-thirds majority in the next General Conference. Either course might be pursued in amending the constitution.

There was, however, as we have seen, one exception, and that was in relation to the first Restrictive Rule.

The insertion of the words "excepting the first article," made it impossible by the above process to change the Restrictive Rule in regard to the doctrines of the Church. In other words, it was impossible for a single General Conference, even with the agree-

ment of the ministry in the Annual Conferences to amend the First Restrictive Rule. Consequently some have inferred that there is no way of changing the Restrictive Rule as to standards of doctrine. This, however, is a mistake.

By the constitution of 1808, the Annual Conferences and the next succeeding General Conference could amend or eliminate the First Restrictive Rule or any other restriction. By the provision of 1832, the first rule was excepted from the process by which the other regulations could be amended; but this did not make it absolutely impossible to change the restriction as to standards of doctrine. The intention of the makers of the new provision was to protect the doctrines from hasty change by making the process of amendment more lengthy and difficult than in the case of the other restrictions.

The new provision for amendment created a double process. First, it would be necessary to amend the provision for amendment by striking out the words "excepting the first article." This, according to the constitution, could be done by the action of the ministers in the Annual Conferences and the concurrence of the next General Conference, or by the action of two-thirds in the General Conference and the concurrence of three-fourths in the Annual Conferences. If this was agreed to, then the first restriction would no longer be an exception, and it could be amended just as any other restriction.

In this way it might be possible to change the restriction as to standards of doctrine within the

period of two General Conferences, or four years. Thus a General Conference might recommend the striking out of the words "excepting the first article," and the ministers in the Annual Conferences the next year might concur. This being done, the words would be eliminated. Then the next year an amendment to the first Restrictive Rule might be passed around the Annual Conferences, and agreed to by the requisite three-fourths vote, and if the next General Conference concurred by a two-thirds vote, the amendment would be effected.

The new provision, as already seen, permitted the General Conference to originate and vote upon an amendment to the constitution before the amendment was passed upon by the ministry in the Annual Conferences. This allowed the General Conference to originate and vote upon a change before the amendment was submitted to the members of the Annual Conferences.

The Committee on Itinerancy anticipated this right, and, on May 7th, in connection with the report already referred to, submitted the following:

"*Resolved*, That the article number two in the Restrictive Rules be so altered as to read, 'They shall not allow of more than one representative for every fourteen members of the Annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every thirty.' Signed, L. Clark, Chairman."[1]

This was called the second resolution of the committee. It was made the order of the day for the 9th, but was not reached until the 10th of May.

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 378.

The record is as follows: "On considering the second resolution, it was moved and carried that it be recommitted to the committee, with instructions which were given by some of the preachers verbally, to consider and report."[1]

The next day the committee reported, "On taking the question upon the first resolution, a division of the subject was called for. The question was then taken on the first part as far as the proviso, and carried unanimously."

This refers to the ratio of representation making it not more than one for fourteen, and not less than one for thirty. The Journal does not give the "proviso" as reported by the committee, but merely says: "The question on the proviso was then taken; yeas, one hundred and twenty-two; nays, seventy-two; consequently, as there was not a majority of two-thirds in the affirmative, the question on the proviso was lost."[2] W. Fisk then moved to amend the report by inserting the following resolution, viz.:

"*Resolved*, That in any case where there is a fraction of two-thirds of the number fixed on, according to the rules for the ratio of delegation, then, and in every such case, the Conference having such fraction shall be entitled to a delegate for such fraction; provided, however, that no Conference shall be denied the privilege of one delegate for such fraction."

"It was moved and seconded to amend this resolution by striking out the word 'one,' and inserting 'two.' Carried.

"When the question on the resolution as amended

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 383. [2] *Id.*, 385.

was called for, and before the question was put, L. Clark moved to strike out that part of the resolution relating to the fraction, which motion was subsequently withdrawn, and the question was put on the resolution as amended, and carried by a majority of considerably more than two-thirds. The second resolution in the report was then called up. The question was put on it as far as the proviso, and carried."[1]

On May 11, 1832, the report of the Committee on Itinerancy on the ratio of representation was considered "as far as the proviso," and at that point the Conference adjourned. On Tuesday, May 22d, "the report of the Committee on Itinerancy was called up." "S. K. Hodges moved to reconsider the vote by which a fraction of two-thirds should be entitled to a representative. Lost."[2]

"The second resolution in the report was then taken up. It was moved to amend it by striking out the part relating to fractions. Lost. The question on the adoption of the resolution was then taken. Carried—178 to 3."[3]

This looks a little confused; but the fact is that Wilbur Fisk's motion was an amendment to the report, and the resolution as amended does not appear to have been agreed to. Hence the motion to reconsider related to the amendment, while the motion to strike out referred to the resolution as amended. Still, it seems a little indefinite.

"The third resolution was then read and adopted.

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 385. [2] *Id.*, p. 401.
[3] Journal, 1832, p. 402.

"The fourth resolution was read and adopted.

"The whole report, as amended, was then adopted by a unanimous vote."[1]

The report as adopted is as follows:

"*Resolved*, 1. That this General Conference recommend to the several Annual Conferences, for their concurrence and adoption, as provided in the Sixth Article of the Restrictive Rules, the following resolution to amend the Second Article of the said Restrictive Rules:

"*Resolved*, 2. That the Second Article of the Restrictive Rules be so altered as to read: 'They shall not allow of more than one representative for every fourteen members of the Annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every thirty; provided, nevertheless, that when there shall be, in any Annual Conference, a fraction of two-thirds of the number which shall be fixed for the ratio of representation,[2] such Annual Conference shall be entitled to an additional delegate for such fraction; and provided, also, that no Conference shall be deprived of the privilege of two delegates.

"*Resolved*, 3. That the secretary furnish each of the bishops with a copy of those resolutions, and they are hereby respectfully requested to present the same to their several Annual Conferences, or cause them to be presented, at their next session for their concurrence; and when the bishops, or any two of the bishops, shall have ascertained that three-fourths of all the members of the several Annual Conferences, voting in the case, have concurred with this General Conference, they shall certify the same, and cause such certificate to be printed in the Minutes, and published three successive weeks in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*.

"*Resolved*, 4. That the ratio of representation for the next General Conference be one for every fourteen; provided the Annual Conferences concur in the alteration as above recommended by this Conference, and that the Discipline, in section three, answer one, to question two, on page nineteen, shall

---

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 402.

[2] In Fisk's amendment the words were, "ratio of delegation."

thereupon be so altered as to read: 'The General Conference shall be composed of one member for every fourteen members of each Annual Conference,' etc."[1]

These amendments were agreed to, and the Discipline issued in 1836 showed the changes thus made, in harmony with the second resolution. This not only changed the limits of the sliding scale, but also introduced a new feature, namely, fractional representation.

On Friday afternoon, May 25, 1832, an effort was made to have the General Conference alone change the time for opening the General Conference from the first of May to the first of June. This is the record:

"On motion of D. Ostrander, seconded by W. Winans:

"WHEREAS, Great inconveniences have been experienced when the General Conference commences its session on the first day of May, on account of many of the delegates, especially from the North and East, having to start in a season when the winter is just breaking up and the roads (are) very bad, and when the navigation is still obstructed by ice; and whereas, it is believed that it is perfectly within the province of this Conference to vary the time of its meeting; therefore,

"*Resolved*, That the next General Conference will commence its session on the first day of June, instead of the first day of May.

"Laid on the table."[2]

This shows that some believed the General Conference had power to change anything in relation to the General Conference, with the exception of the Restrictive Rules; but from the fact that the General Conference laid the resolution on the table, and did not

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. I, p. 402. [2] *Id.*, p. 413.

take it up, it is evident that the Conference itself did not believe that it had power to change the date for opening a General Conference session, or to make any other change in the body of the constitution of 1808, without the concurrence of the ministers in the Annual Conferences.

In the General Conference of 1836 an effort was made to further reduce the ratio of representation. On the 27th of May, 1836, "on motion of J. Early, the resolution of P. P. Sandford was called up, and adopted as follows:

"*Resolved*, That the ratio of delegation for the next General Conference be fixed at one delegate for twenty-one members of each Annual Conference."[1]

This the Conference had the power to do under the sliding scale agreed to by the General Conference of 1832 and the members of the Annual Conference in the quadrennium following that Conference. So this change went at once into the Discipline of 1836.

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. 1, p. 498.

CHAPTER XV.

CHANGES IN THE CHAPTER ON THE GENERAL CONFERENCE FROM 1856 TO 1868.

THE bishops, in their Address to the General Conference of 1856, suggested "the propriety of reducing the ratio of representation," and said: "There is already constitutional provision for such reduction, so as to authorize, at your discretion, not less than one representative for every thirty members of Annual Conferences."[1]

The Committee on Revisals recommended "the insertion of the words, 'twenty-seven,' in place of 'twenty-one' in Part I, chap. iii, sec. 2, Ans. 1, of the Book of Discipline," and the General Conference adopted the report, thus making the ratio of representation one for twenty-seven.[2] The same committee recommended "the alteration of the Second Restrictive Rule so as to insert 'one for every forty-five' in place of 'one for every thirty.'"[3]

"The proposition to change the Second Restrictive Rule was adopted by a vote of more than two-thirds of all the members of the General Conference in its favor."[4]

---

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. 1856, III, p. 193. [2] *Id.*, p. 158.
[3] *Ibid.* [4] *Id.*, p. 154.

Sherman states that "the General Conference of 1856 referred the question of this change to the Annual Conferences, which concurred;" [1] but it is a little remarkable that the bishops, in their Address to the General Conference of 1860, make no mention of having submitted this, though they refer to questions which they did submit to the Annual Conferences, "by request of the Conferences in which they originated." [2] It is clear, however, that the Annual Conferences did vote upon it, for the Committee on Itinerancy, in the General Conference of 1860 made the following report:

"The subject of the vote to suspend the Second Restrictive Rule by the several Annual Conferences, to increase the rate of representation in the General Conference, was referred to us. We find it impossible to report, as many of the Journals could not be examined, the delegations having sent them home. We present the following resolutions:

"1. *Resolved*, That the bishops be authorized to make the report so that the alteration may be made in the forthcoming Discipline." [3]

This appears to have been attended to; for the Discipline of 1860 shows the change in the Second Restrictive Rule so that it read "nor allow a less number than one for every forty-five," instead of "one for every thirty." [4]

In their Address to the General Conference of 1856 the bishops called attention to the desirability

---

[1] David Sherman, D. D., History of the Revisions of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1890, 3d Ed., p. 145.

[2] General Conference Journals, Vol. IV, 1860, p. 319.

[3] *Id.*, pp. 294.

[4] Discipline, 1860, p. 46.

of changing the constitution in regard to calling extra sessions. They said:

"The rule requiring the concurrent advice of all the Annual Conferences to authorize the bishops to call an extra session of the General Conference we think unnecessarily restrictive. We have now thirty-eight Annual Conferences, and a probability of more; yet any one of them, though the least of all, might defeat the wishes of all the others in regard to an extra session, whatever might be the necessity for it. We respectfully suggest that any state of affairs which would satisfy three-fourths or even two-thirds of the Annual Conferences, and the bishops, that an extra session of the General Conference was really necessary, shou'd be deemed a sufficient reason for calling it."[1]

On this suggestion the Committee on Revisals reported as follows:

"The committee having duly considered that part of the Bishops' Address which relates to the call of an extra session of the General Conference, recommend the insertion of the following in Part I, ch. iii, sec. 2, in place of our present provision for calling an extra session of the General Conference:

"But the general superintendents, or a majority of them, by or with the advice of two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences, or, if there be no general superintendent, two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences, shall have power to call an extra session of the General Conference at any time, to be constituted in the usual way."

This was adopted.[2]

This was intended to change the constitution so that instead of requiring the consent of all the Annual Conferences, the consent of two-thirds would be sufficient. It introduced for the first time the phrase "extra session of the General Conference," and

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. III, 1856, p. 193. [2] *Id.*, p. 153.

also specified that it was "to be constituted in the usual way."

We have no evidence that this was voted upon by the Annual Conferences prior to the General Conference of 1856, or subsequently to that session, but the change appears in the Discipline of 1856. This appears to have been done solely by the General Conference, and, if this was the case, it was unconstitutional; for the constitution could not be changed legally excepting by the concurrence of the constitution-making powers, which were the ministers in the Annual Conferences together with the General Conference.

It was, therefore, in all probability illegally inserted, as it never received the vote of the Annual Conferences; but as it has stood so long, and has been so generally accepted, its present constitutionality will scarcely be challenged with any thought of having it declared invalid.

The most important change proposed by the General Conference of 1856 was an amendment to the Third Restrictive Rule, which read: "They shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away episcopacy or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency."[1]

Amendments to this rule had been proposed in the General Conference of 1852,[2] but the propositions were not agreed to. The object of these pro-

[1] Discipline, 1856, p. 36.

[2] General Conference Journals, Vol. III, 1852, pp. 66, 67, 76, 79, 94, 96, 97.

posals was to provide supervision for the foreign mission-field in Africa.

In the General Conference of 1856 the question was again introduced through a suggestion in the Episcopal Address. The bishops, in their Address, suggested three ways of meeting the difficulty: First, to send a bishop to organize "the Methodist Episcopal Church of Africa;" second, to let the mission in Liberia organize itself; and, third, to appoint a missionary bishop to take charge of the foreign work, while the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States retained jurisdiction.[1]

The Committee on Missions reported, on the 10th of May, in favor of a "missionary bishop, who shall reside in Liberia, on the western coast of Africa, or in its vicinity, and have episcopal jurisdiction in Africa only."[2] The report was taken up on the 16th of May, and various motions bearing upon the subject were referred to the Committee on Missions.[3] The matter was again considered on the 20th, the 24th, and the 31st days of May.[4] On the latter day the following resolution was adopted:

"*Resolved*, That we recommend to the several Annual Conferences to alter the Discipline, paragraph 3, section 2, Part I, by adding the words, after the word 'superintendency' in the fourth line, 'but may appoint a missionary bishop or superintendent for any of our foreign missions, limiting his episcopal jurisdiction to the same respectively.'"[5]

This amendment was submitted to the Annual Conferences, and received from the ministers the

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. III, 1856, p. 198. [2] *Id.*, p. 56.
[3] *Id.*, pp. 80, 81. [4] *Id.*, pp. 96, 115, 144, 146. [5] *Id.*, pp. 144–146.

requisite vote, so that the bishops, in their Address to the General Conference of 1860, said: "The action of the last General Conference in relation to missionary bishops having been laid before the several Annual Conferences, and the requisite majority of the Annual Conferences having concurred with the General Conference in the proposition to so alter the Discipline as to allow the appointment of a missionary bishop or superintendent for any of our foreign missions,"[1] they had, on the 14th of October, 1858, set apart the Rev. Francis Burns as the first missionary bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The amendment having been duly made, should have been inserted in the first Discipline issued after the concurrence of the ministry in the Annual Conferences, but in some way it did not appear until 1872.[2]

Then the amended rule read as follows: "They shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away episcopacy or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency; but may appoint a missionary bishop or superintendent for any of our foreign missions, limiting his jurisdiction to the same respectively,"[3]—and so it has stood until the present time.

In this, however, there is one error: As passed by the General Conference of 1856 it contained the word "episcopal;" and read, not "his jurisdiction,"

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. IV, 1860, p. 313.

[2] Sherman says it appeared in 1868; but it does not appear in my Discipline of 1868, while it does for the first time in that of 1872.

[3] Discipline of 1872.

but "his episcopal jurisdiction." The latter form was the way it was passed in the Annual Conferences; as, for example, the Journal of the Philadelphia Annual Conference for April 1, 1857, clearly shows. Why this qualifying word was omitted, we can not say. It might have been a mere accident, or the editor who inserted it might have stricken out the word as superfluous. However that may be, and notwithstanding the fact that it never has been printed in the Discipline, yet it legally stands in the law as adopted, whether printed or not, and ought to be inserted in the next edition.

The adoption of this amendment inaugurated a new policy for foreign fields, and was a recognition of the fact that the Conferences outside the United States did not have the same status as those in this country.

In 1860 the General Conference changed the ratio of representation to one for thirty by adopting the following:

"*Resolved*, That the ratio for the representation to the next General Conference be one representative for every thirty members of the Annual Conference."[1]

On May 24, 1864, John M. Reid, chairman of the Committtee on Itinerancy, presented a report containing various items, one of which was a proposition for "a change of the Restrictive Rule allowing each Conference, however small, at least two delegates."[2] On May 26th the ayes and noes were ordered, and the

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. IV, 1860, p. 295.
[2] *Id.*, Vol. V, 1864, p. 208.

report was adopted by 144 ayes against 59 noes, 11 being absent.[1]

The report as adopted was as follows:

"*Resolved*, That the Second Restrictive Rule be amended by striking out the last words of the rule, namely, 'two delegates,' and inserting in their place the following, namely, 'one delegate,' so that it may read: 'Provided, also, that no Conference shall be denied the privilege of one delegate.'"[2]

This was followed by another resolution, namely:

"*Resolved*, That the bishops be directed to present the above at the next session of each Annual Conference for their concurrence; and, when all the Annual Conferences have acted upon it, publicly to announce the result, and authorize the Book Agents to amend the published copy of the Discipline accordingly."[3]

In their Address of 1868 the bishops do not mention the action of the ministers in the Annual Conference, but the change appears for the first time in the Discipline for 1868.

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. V, 1864, pp. 235, 236.
[2] *Id.*, p. 236. [3] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XVI.

CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTION FROM 1868 TO 1888.

THE greatest change in the chapter on the General Conference was brought about by an amendment admitting laymen into that body.

The question of lay representation had been before the Church for many years. "The first discussion of this subject commenced by the local preachers, who felt that, in the delegated Conference in 1812, they were without any representation. . . . The discussion on this subject spread more fully throughout the Church between 1816 and 1820. . . Everywhere, however, the discussion was connected with the abolition of the episcopacy and the presiding eldership,"[1] and the agitation culminated in the organization of the Methodist Protestant Church in 1828–1830.

In 1840, "certain abolitionists"[2] "petitioned the General Conference, asking for lay representation,"[3] but the General Conference adopted the report of a committee declaring "that it is not expedient to change the form of our Church government in any of the matters suggested."[4]

[1] Bishop Simpson's Cyclopedia of Methodism, Philadelphia, 1881, p. 530.

[2] James Porter, D. D., History of Methodism, Cincinnati and New York, 1876, p. 499.

[3] General Conference Journals, Vol. II, pp. 27, 32, 33. [4] *Id.*, p. 75.

In 1852 the subject was referred to a committee of twenty-nine, of which Dr. Matthew Simpson was chairman.[1] This committee reported "that it is inexpedient so to alter the economy of our Church as to introduce lay delegation into the General and Annual Conferences,"[2] and the report was adopted by one hundred and seventy-one yeas to three nays."[3]

In their Address to the General Conference of 1860, the bishops referred to the subject, but did not recommend the adoption of lay delegation.[4] A committee reported on the question,[5] and the report and various substitutes occupied the attention of the Conference for several days,[6] when the subject was recommitted to a committee consisting of Davis W. Clark, James Porter, and Sidney Dean. The report of this committee submitted the question to the Annual Conferences, and also to the "male members over twenty-one years of age."[7] The vote, as officially reported by the bishops to the General Conference of 1864, was as follows: "Of the ministers there were 1,338 votes for, 3,069 against; of the male members, 28,884 for, 47,855 against."[8]

The General Conference of 1868 had the question under consideration,[9] and a committee of Con-

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. III, p. 26. [2] *Id.*, pp. 147, 148.
[3] *Id.*, pp. 90, 91.
[4] General Conference Journals, Vol. IV, 1860, pp. 319, 320.
[5] General Conference Journals, Vol. IV, 1860, p. 248; Majority and Minority Reports, pp. 445, 447.
[6] General Conference Journals, Vol. IV, 1860, pp. 278, 279-285.
[7] *Id.*, pp. 289, 290.
[8] General Conference Journals, Vol. V, 1864, p. 278.
[9] General Conference Journals, Vol. VI, 1868, pp. 33, 69, 226, 227, 258, 259, 262, 263.

ference was appointed "with a view to prepare a plan."[1] This committee brought in a report[2] as follows:

"WHEREAS, the General Conference of 1860 expressed its willingness to admit lay delegates to the General Conference whenever the people should desire it; and *whereas*, the General Conference of 1864 concurred in that action; therefore,

"*Resolved*, 1. That we also concur in the same, and recommend the following plan to the godly consideration of our ministers and people:

"Change the Discipline, page 45, Part II, chapter i, sec 1, so that it shall read as follows:

"*Ques.* Who shall compose the General Conference, and what are the regulations and powers belonging to it?

"*Ans.* 1. The General Conference shall be composed of ministerial and lay delegates. The ministerial delegates shall consist of one member for every thirty (30) members of each Annual Conference, to be appointed either by seniority or choice, at the discretion of such Annual Conference, yet so that such representatives shall have traveled at least four full calendar years from the time that they were received on trial by an Annual Conference, and are in full connection at the time of holding the Conference.

"The lay delegates shall consist of two laymen for each Annual Conference, except such Conferences as have but one ministerial delegate, which Conferences shall be entitled to one lay delegate each.

"The lay delegates shall be chosen by an Electoral Conference of laymen, which shall assemble for the purpose on the third day of the session of the Annual Conference, at the place of its meeting, at its session immediately preceding the General Conference.

"The Electoral Conference shall be composed of one laymen from each circuit or station within the bounds of the Annual Conference, and, on assembling, the Electoral Conference shall organize by electing a chairman and secretary of

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. VI, 1868, pp. 264, 265.
[2] *Id.*, pp. 271-277.

their own number; such layman to be chosen by the last Quarterly Conference preceding the time of its assembling; provided that no layman shall be chosen a delegate either to the Electoral Conference or to the General Conference who shall be under twenty-five years of age, or who shall not have been a member of the Church in full connection for the five consecutive years preceding the elections.

"Alter Ans. 3 as follows, page 46:

"*Ans.* 3. At all times, when the General Conference is met, it shall take two-thirds of the whole number of ministerial and lay delegates to form a quorum for transacting business.

"The ministerial and lay delegates shall sit and deliberate together as one body, but they shall vote separately whenever such separate vote shall be demanded by one third of either order, and in such cases the concurrent vote of both orders shall be necessary to complete an action.

"*Resolved*, 2. That during the month of June, 1869, on any day except the Sabbath, the time to be determined by the pastor and the two laymen appointed by the Quarterly Conference as hereinafter provided, there shall be held a general election in the several places of worship of the Methodist Episcopal Church, at which all members in full connection, and not less than twenty-one years of age, shall be invited to vote by ballot: 'For Lay Delegation' or 'Against Lay Delegation.' This election shall be held under the direction of the preacher in charge and two laymen appointed for the purpose by the Quarterly Conference, who shall see that due notice is given thereof for at least twenty days before the election, and who shall superintend all the details of the election. They shall report the result within ten days after the election to the presiding elder of the district, who shall report the same to the bishop presiding at the ensuing Annual Conference, to be entered upon the Conference Journal.

"It shall be the duty of the bishops presiding at the several Annual Conferences, at their first sessions after the above elections, to lay before those bodies the following proposed amendments to the Second Restrictive Rule, namely: At the end of line three, after the word 'one,' insert the word 'ministerial' (page 47 of the Discipline), and after the word 'forty-five,' line seven, same page, add the words 'nor more than

two lay delegates for any Annual Conference;' and to report the result to the next General Conference, so that, as amended, it shall read, 'They shall not allow of more than one ministerial representative for every fourteen (14) members of the Annual Conference, nor allow of a less number than one for every forty-five (45), nor more than two lay delegates for any Annual Conference.'

"*Resolved*, 3, That should a majority of votes cast by the people be in favor of lay delegation, and should three-fourths (¾) of all the members of the Annual Conferences present and voting thereon vote in favor of the above proposed change in the constitution of the Church, then the General Conference meeting in 1872, by the requisite two-thirds (⅔) vote, can complete the change, and lay delegates previously elected may then be admitted."[1]

Under this act "all members in full connection, and not less than twenty-one years of age," were invited to vote "for lay delegation" or "against lay delegation." "The result of the vote of the membership showed over 100,000 in favor and about 50,000 against."[2]

The Journal of the General Conference of 1872 does not give the vote of the Church members on this question, and we have not the exact figures at hand; but the above statement may be regarded as sufficiently accurate for all practical purposes. It is enough to know that a majority of those who voted cast their ballots in favor of lay delegation. Under the constitution of the Church this vote of the laity had no legal value, but was taken as an expression of

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. VI, 1868, pp. 275-277, and Appendix to Discipline of 1868.

[2] Bishop Simpson's Cyclopædia of Methodism, Philadelphia, 1881, p. 581

opinion upon the part of the people. Of the two, the constitutional vote was that of the ministry in the Annual Conferences. This alone, under the law of the Church, had any force whatever in determining a change in the constitution.

On the first day of the session of the General Conference of 1872, Bishop Simpson, in behalf of the bishops, reported the ministerial vote as follows:

"DEAR BRETHREN,—The last General Conference devised a plan for lay delegation, which they recommended to the godly consideration of our ministers and people. In connection with this plan, they directed the bishops to lay before the several Annual Conferences a proposed alteration of the Second Restrictive Rule, and to report the result of the vote thereon to this General Conference.

"In compliance with said action, we laid before each of the Annual Conferences the proposition to alter the Second Restrictive Rule, by adding thereto the word 'ministerial' after the word 'one,' and after the word 'forty-five' the words 'nor more than two lay delegates for any Annual Conference.' Each Conference voted on said proposition, and the aggregate result is as follows:

"For the proposed change, ... 4,915
"Against the proposed change, ... 1,597
"Blank, ... 4"[1]

After this report had been read, the following paper, signed by J. T. Peck, W. L. Harris, R. S. Foster, G. Haven, and T. M. Eddy, was presented:

"WHEREAS, The General Conference, at its session in Chicago in 1868, devised a plan for the admission of lay delegates as members of said General Conference, and recommended it to the godly consideration of our ministers and people; and

"WHEREAS, A large majority of the members of the Meth-

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. VII, 1872, p. 39.

odist Episcopal Church, present and voting in accordance with the provisions of said plan, voted in favor of lay delegation; and

"WHEREAS, Three-fourths of the members of the Annual Conferences voted in favor of the change of the Restrictive Rules proposed in said plan, for the purpose of making it lawful to admit to the General Conference lay delegates elected in accordance with said plan; therefore,

"*Resolved*, 1. by the delegates of the several Annual Conferences in General Conference assembled, That the change in the Restrictive Rules submitted by the General Conferences, and adopted by the required three-fourths of the members of the Annual Conferences voting thereon, in accordance with the provisions of said plan in the words following, to-wit: (see Plan), be and hereby is adopted.

"*Resolved*, 2. That said plan is hereby ratified and adopted, and declared to be in full force; and the lay delegates elected under it are hereby invited to take their seats as members of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, on their credentials now in the hands of the secretary."[1]

At this stage of the proceedings a substitute was offered, in regard to which the record is as follows:

"On motion of William F. Cowles, the Conference ordered a division of the matter pending, so that the vote may be first taken on the proposed change of the Second Restrictive Rule; whereupon the mover accepted, as a substitute for so much as relates to this subject, the following, namely:

"'*Resolved*, That this General Conference does hereby concur with the Annual Conferences in changing the Second Restrictive Rule, so as to read as follows:

"'They shall not allow of more than one ministerial representative for every fourteen members of an Annual Conference, nor allow of less than one for every forty-five; nor more than two lay delegates for any Annual Conference.'"[2]

This, consequently, took the place of Dr. Peck's first resolution. Upon it a yea and nay vote was

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. VII, 1872, p. 40. [2] *Id.*, p. 41.

ordered, and the resolution was adopted by a vote of 283 in the affirmative, to 6 in the negative; while 3 were recorded as absent or not voting.[1]

The amendment to the Second Restrictive Rule having received the requisite vote in the Annual Conferences, and now having received the constitutional vote in the General Conference, the rule was accordingly amended by the constitutional process.

There was, however, a slight difference between the form of words as voted upon by the General Conference of 1872 and that voted upon in the Annual Conferences. It will be noticed that the form in the resolution of W. F. Cowles, as adopted by the General Conference of 1872, read, "nor allow of less than one for every forty-five," while the form as presented in 1868 and adopted by the ministry in the Annual Conferences, read, "nor allow of *a less number* than one for every forty-five." The Discipline of 1872 has the latter form which no doubt fairly represents the intention, though they were not the exact words passed by the General Conference of 1872.

On the same day, A. J. Kynett offered a paper "as a substitute for the second resolution of the paper presented by Jesse T. Peck." Dr. Kynett's paper contained the following resolutions:

"*Resolved*, 1. That the said plan, *recommended* as above by the last General Conference, and published in the Appendix to the Discipline, page 333, be and is hereby *adopted*, to be inserted in the Discipline as directed; it being, however, understood that the General Conference, as thus constituted, may

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. VII, 1872, p. 43.

at any time alter or amend the same, and cause such alteration or amendment to take immediate effect.

"*Resolved*, 2. That the credentials of lay delegates be now received, and that they be entitled to seats in this General Conference."[1]

This was a claim that the General Conference alone could "at any time alter or amend" the body of the constitution, which certainly was contrary to all constitution-making principles, and contrary to constitutional ideas as taught by the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This theory would put only the Restrictive Rules beyond the sole control of the General Conference.

"On motion, this substitute was laid on the table,"[2] and the General Conference, for that time, refused to take this dangerous position.

W. F. Cowles offered another substitute, which also was laid on the table.[3] "On motion, the Conference ordered a division of the question, so as to vote on so much of the pending resolution as ratifies and adopts the 'plan' of lay delegation."

This referred to the first part of Dr. Peck's second resolution. "At this stage of the proceedings the previous question was ordered, and the vote was taken by ayes and noes," and the result showed 252 ayes, 36 noes, and 4 absent or not voting; so the first item of the resolution was therefore adopted, in words following, viz.:

"*Resolved*, That said plan is hereby ratified and adopted."[4]

---

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. VII, 1872, p. 43. [2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Id.*, pp. 43, 44. [4] *Id.*, pp. 44–46.

The Journal then states that, "by this action, Answer 1 to the question, 'Who shall compose the General Conference, and what are the regulations and powers belonging to it?' in Part II, chap. i, sec. 1, of the Discipline, was so changed as to read"[1] as in "The Plan" suggested in 1868.

"Samuel A. W. Jewett submitted, as a substitute for the remaining portion of the resolution, a motion that the roll of laymen whose certificates of election are in the hands of the secretary be now called, and that those persons who may be duly accredited be admitted to seats in this General Conference. The vote on this motion was taken by ayes and noes, with the following result:" Ayes, 288; nay, 1; absent or not voting, 3,[2]—William H. Perrine, D. D., of Michigan, being the only one who voted in the negative. Certificates of election were then presented by the laymen, and lay delegation was incorporated in the General Conference.

The Journal states that, by the vote of the General Conference, "The Plan" was placed in the chapter on the General Conference; but as to the constitutionality of this, many grave questions have been raised. Some hold that the part of the Discipline which relates to the composition and powers of the General Conference is a single instrument, in the nature of a constitution, and that to change any part that refers to the composition of the body, it is necessary to pursue the same process which would be required in amending a Restrictive Rule.

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. VII, 1872, pp. 46. [2] *Id.*, pp. 46–48.

That this is a sound principle must be admitted. If, then, "The Plan" was not voted upon by the ministers in the Annual Conferences, and did not receive the requisite three-fourths vote, its incorporation in the constitution was not constitutional, even if it had received a unanimous vote in the General Conference.

Some maintain that neither preachers nor people voted upon "The Plan," but upon the principle. As a matter of fact, the members voted "for lay delegation" or "against lay delegation;" and the ministers in the Annual Conferences voted only on the amendment to the Restrictive Rule. This amendment was all that the bishops were instructed to submit to the Annual Conferences—was all that was submitted to the Annual Conferences; and the vote of the ministers upon that is all the bishops presented in their report.

The New Hampshire Conference, in April, 1870, presented to Bishop Simpson, who was in the chair, the question whether its vote would "include the adoption of the plan of the General Conference, or simply the amendment of the Second Restrictive Rule," and he decided that "the vote of the Conference was not to be on the plan, but simply and alone on the alteration of the Restrictive Rule;" and "Bishop Baker, who was present, was announced as concurring in this decision."[1]

"The *Methodist* of April 16th, and *Zion's Herald*

[1] Principles of Church Government, by W. H. Perrine, D. D., edited by J. H. Potts, D. D., New York, 1887, pp. 41, 42.

of April 14th, same year, said: 'Bishop Janes, before the New York Conference, declared that the vote of the Conference did not touch the plan, but only gave the General Conference power to admit laymen to its body.'"[1]

The Rev. Dr. J. M. Reid, editor of the *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, in March 1872, said: "1. The *people* voted only on the principle, and not on the *plan*. Their ballots were 'for lay delegation,' and 'against lay delegation.' 2. The ministers did not vote on the *plan*, but solely on the alteration of the Restrictive Rule. Nothing else was ever submitted to the Conferences by the bishops. They were not authorized to present anything else."[2]

Dr. Daniel Curry, editor of the *Christian Advocate*, said: "The 'Plan' was simply recommended to the *consideration* of ministers and people;"[3] and the Michigan Annual Conferences put on record the following: "(1) The vote we cast is solely upon the change of the Restrictive Rule. (2) We do not indorse the plan proposed by the General Conference for our consideration."[4]

It would seem plain, therefore, that the Annual Conferences did not vote upon the plan.

It might be assumed that they tacitly agreed to the plan; but the facts already cited show that bishops declared the Conferences were not to vote on the plan, and that at least some of the Conferences explicitly declared they did not vote on the "Plan;" and, therefore,

---

[1] Perrine's Principles of Church Government, p. 42. [2] *Id.*, p. 45.
[3] *Id.*, pp. 44, 45. [4] *Id.*, p. 51.

its insertion into the body of the constitution relating to the composition and organization of the General Conference was not made in a constitutional manner.

The intention of a voter can only be inferred from the vote he casts; and, as the ministers in the Annual Conferences only voted for the amendment to the Restrictive Rule, we must infer that the amendment to the rule was all they intended. Certainly no amendment can be made to a constitution except by a vote on the exact language of the proposed change, which was not the case in the present instance.

The insertion of the plan by the General Conference was not a "regulation," but an amendment to the body of the constitution, which could not be done by the General Conference alone; and it can not be maintained that the amendment to the Second Restrictive Rule necessarily carried with it the details of the plan; for, while the amendment brought the laity into the General Conference in a legal manner, it did not necessarily involve the details of the plan, for these details required further constitutional amendment.

That a great and representative body like the General Conference made the changes referred to, does not prove that the action was right, or that the changes were made in a proper manner. So Judge Hare remarks: "It is on this principle—that the validity of a command depends, not on the dignity or rank of the person from whom it comes, but on whether he is duly authorized; and that an illegal

order, from whatever source, is void—that the balance of the constitution depends."[1]

The proper course would have been, to have submitted the entire amendment, including the "Plan," to the vote of the members of the Annual Conferences.

However, as the "Plan" has stood in the constitution for almost twenty years, it is not likely that any serious effort will be made to question its present constitutionality, no matter what a critical judgment may say as to the faultiness of the process. It may be claimed that an objection is precluded by the law of limitations, and that an unconstitutional change has become constitutional by lapse of time, and failure to take exception at the proper time. This might not be the ruling of a Supreme Court in State or Nation, but it will probably be the decision of the Supreme Court of public opinion.

The act of the body of the ministry in the Annual Conferences and of the ministers in the General Conference, in providing for lay delegation, has been pronounced the most remarkable instance of the voluntary relinquishment of power to be found in the history of the world.

The clergy were under no compulsion to give up the authority they had possessed from the beginning, and yet they voluntarily admitted the laity into the supreme legislative body of the Church to share with them the vast powers of the General Conference.

The "Plan" had "one member for every thirty

[1] J I. Clark Hare, LL. D., American Constitutional Law, Boston, 1889, Vol. I, p. 29.

members of each Annual Conference" which was the same as it had been since 1860, but the Discipline of 1872 read "one member for every forty-five members." The Committee on Itinerancy recommended a change from one for thirty to one for thirty-nine, but Mr. Hiram Price moved to amend the report by striking out thirty-nine and inserting forty-five, so that the clause would read: "The ministerial delegates shall consist of one member for every forty-five members of each Annual Conference,"[1] and the amendment was adopted. This change to forty-five the General Conference had a right to make under the Second Restrictive Rule as it then stood. In 1860 the General Conference made a deliverance on the rights of transferred preachers.[2] This for some years appeared in the Appendix to the Discipline until the General Conference of 1872 ordered that this decision in a slightly modified form should be placed as a foot-note to the first paragraph of the section on the General Conference, as follows: "A transferred preacher shall not be counted twice in the same year as the basis of the election of delegates to the General Conference, nor vote for delegates to the General Conference in any Annual Conference where he is not counted as a part of the basis of representation, nor vote twice the same year on any constitutional question."[3]

So the General Conference of 1868 passed a reso-

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. VII, 1872, p. 343.
[2] General Conference Journals, 1860, p. 364.
[3] General Conference Journals, Vol. VII, 1872, p. 488.

lution in regard to certificates of election to the General Conference.[1] This also stood in the Appendix to the Discipline until the General Conference of 1872, after inserting the words "and Electoral," directed that it be inserted as a foot-note to Answer 1 to Question 1 in the same section. It appeared, however, as a foot-note to the fourth paragraph, as follows: "The secretaries of the several Annual and Electoral Conferences shall send to the secretary of the last General Conference a certified copy of the election of delegates and reserves to the next General Conference in the order of their election, as soon after the election as practicable, so that a roll of members and reserves may be prepared for the opening of the next General Conference."[2] Though these foot-notes were appended to the constitution they were no part of it, but were merely statutory enactments of the General Conference.

Another minor change that ought to be noted is, that while the "Plan," as adopted by the General Conference of 1872, had, in the paragraph relating to "the Electoral Conference," the words "such lay men to be chosen by the last Quarterly Conference preceding the time of its assembling," the Discipline of 1872 has the words "preceding the time of the assembling of such Electoral Conference." In this there is no change of sense, but rather an improvement in the style. The alteration, however, was the work of the editors. As to their right to change

[1] General Conference Journals, Vol. VI, 1868, p. 210.
[2] General Conference Journals, Vol. VII, 1872, pp. 439, 440.

even a word in the constitution, we have already given an adverse opinion. Dr. Sherman, who is usually quite accurate, is slightly in error in indicating that the words "such laymen to be chosen by the last Quarterly Conference preceding the time of the assembling of such Electoral Conference,"[1] were introduced in 1876.

There was also another change; namely, the omission of the question at the head of the section on the General Conference: "Who shall compose the General Conference, and what are the regulations and powers belonging to it?" In 1792 the question was, "Who shall compose the General Conference?" but the General Conference of 1808, in constructing the constitution for the delegated General Conference, added the words, "And what are the regulations and powers belonging to it?" so that the instrument drawn up by the assembled ministry in 1808 covered not only the powers of the General Conference, but also the regulations as to composition, time of meeting, presidency, quorum, etc., all being of the nature of a constitution. This change was made probably by the editors, for we have not found any specific authorization by the General Conference, though the editors were directed "to number the several paragraphs of the Discipline consecutively."[2]

In the Discipline of 1872 the form of question and answer disappeared in the arrangement of the sections; and so one of the relics of Wesley's method

[1] Sherman's History of the Discipline, 1890, p. 144.
[2] General Conference Journals, Vol. VII, 1872, p. 410.

of asking questions and formulating answers, which became the law for his followers, was eliminated, and has never since reappeared.

In the Discipline of 1884 several minor changes appear in the wording of the chapter on the General Conference. Thus, at the beginning of each Restrictive Rule, after the first, instead of the form, "They shall not," we find the phrase, "The General Conference shall not." This was a better phrasing, and brought the form of all the Restrictive Rules in harmony with that of the First, which always had read "The General Conference shall not."

In the part which said, "The ministerial and lay delegates shall sit and deliberate together as one body," the word "sit" was stricken out, and the word "vote" inserted, and the order changed, so that it read "shall deliberate and vote together."

The Discipline of 1884 shows a substitution of "nor" for "or" in the First Restrictive Rule, altering the form from "shall not revoke, alter, or change" to "shall not revoke, alter, nor change our Articles of Religion, nor establish any new standards." In the Discipline of 1808 the form was "or" and the change of "or" to "nor" in 1884 was the work of the editor or of the printer.

The phrase "the Charter Fund," in the Sixth Restrictive Rule, was changed to "the Chartered Fund," which makes no variation in the sense, while it gives the legal title, as stated elsewhere in the Discipline, the full title, according to the charter granted by the Legislature of Pennsylvania, being:

"The Chartered Fund of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America."

Another change appeared in the part relating to extra sessions. Since 1856 it had read, "Or, if there be no general superintendent, two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences shall have power to call," etc. The editor of the Discipline of 1884 changed "or" to "but," inserted "shall" and "then," began a new sentence, and made it read: "But if there shall be no general superintendent, then two-thirds," etc., and this part was taken out of the place it had occupied and brought down to the foot of the paragraph and the words "such extra session" were added.

A slight change was made in another particular. In 1808 the phrase used in this connection was "with or by the advice." In 1856 the order was changed to read "by or with;" but in 1884 the editor made it read "by and with."

In 1856 this part read as follows: "But the general superintendents, or a majority of them, by or with the advice of two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences, or, if there be no general superintendent, two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences, shall have power to call an extra session of the General Conference at any time, to be constituted in the usual way."

With the editorial changes of 1884, it was made to read: "But the general superintendents, or a majority of them, by and with the advice of two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences, shall have power to call an extra session of the General Conference at any time, to be constituted in the usual way. But if

there shall be no general superintendent, then two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences shall have power to call such extra session."

In 1884 the Discipline shows a slight modification in the first paragraph on the General Conference. The part had read: "The ministerial delegates shall consist of one member for every forty-five members of each Annual Conference." In the Discipline of 1884 "member" was stricken out, and "delegate" inserted, so that it read, "one delegate for every forty-five members."

All these changes are doubtless editorial. Many of them are improvements; but the historian, to be accurate, must declare that changes which are the result of editorial supervision, have not the force of enactments by the General Conference, or of amendments by the constitution-making powers—namely, the body of the ministry in the Annual Conferences and the delegates in the General Conference acting concurrently.

One of the most remarkable of the unconstitutional insertions in the section on the General Conference was made in the Discipline of 1856. It read as follows:

"The General Conference may try appeals from members of Annual Conferences who may have been censured, suspended, expelled, or located without their consent, by a committee embracing not less than fifteen of its members, nor more than one member from each delegation, who, in the presence of a bishop presiding, and one or more of the secretaries of the Conference keeping a faithful record of all the proceedings had, shall have full power to hear and determine

the case, subject to the rules and regulations which govern the said Conference in such proceedings and the records made and the papers submitted in such trials shall be presented to the Conference, and be filed and preserved with the papers of that body."[1]

This appeared in the body of the constitution as Paragraph or Answer 5, just after the paragraph on the Presidency of the General Conference and immediately preceding the recital of the powers of that body.

The General Conference had no right to insert the paragraph on Appeals in this place; for, as we have already seen, while it has "full powers to make rules and regulations" under certain restrictions, it has no power of itself to change or amend the constitution.

In this case, however, the fault was not with the General Conference; for the General Conference ordered that the "paragraph be appended to section 2, of Part I, of the Discipline, entitled 'Of the General Conference.'"[2]

This action made it follow the constitution; but the editor inserted it in the body of the instrument, which, of course, he had no right to do. The most singular circumstance connected with this insertion is the fact that no one appears to have noticed the error, and that it was permitted to stand in the constitution for eight years, or, in other words, in that part of the Discipline of 1856 and 1860, and was not removed until 1864, when it was taken out of the

[1] Discipline 1856, p. 35.
[2] General Conference Journals, Vol. III, 1856, p. 178.

constitution, where it never had a right to be, and was placed in a new chapter, entitled, "Trial of Appeals."[1]

In 1860, a paragraph relating to the matter of raising funds to defray the expenses of delegates to the General Conference, was appended to the section on the General Conference, but it was not inserted in the constitution, and in 1864 it was taken from the end of the section.

After all the changes of eighty years, the following is the section on the General Conference as it stands in the Discipline of 1888:

"THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

"¶ 55. The General Conference shall be composed of ministerial and lay delegates. The ministerial delegates shall consist of one delegate for every forty-five members of each Annual Conference, to be appointed either by seniority or choice, at the discretion of such Annual Conference, yet so that such representatives shall have traveled at least four full calendar years from the time that they were received on trial by an Annual Conference, and are in full connection at the time of holding the Conference.*

"¶ 56. The lay delegates shall consist of two laymen for each Annual Conference, except such Conferences as have but one ministerial delegate, which Conferences shall each be entitled to one lay delegate.

"¶ 57. The lay delegates shall be chosen by an Electoral Conference of laymen, which shall assemble for the purpose

[1] Discipline 1864, Chapter II, Section 1, ¶ 2.

* A transferred preacher shall not be counted twice in the same year in the basis of the election of delegates to the General Conference, nor vote for delegates to the General Conference in any Annual Conference where he is not counted as a part of the basis of representation, nor vote twice the same year on any constitutional question.

on the third day of the session of the Annual Conference, at the place of its meeting, at its session immediately preceding that of the General Conference.

"¶ 58. The Electoral Conference shall be composed of one layman from each circuit or station within the bounds of the Annual Conference, such laymen to be chosen by the last Quarterly Conference preceding the time of the assembling of such Electoral Conference; and on assembling, the Electoral Conference shall organize by electing a chairman and secretary of its own number: *Provided*, that no layman shall be chosen a delegate either to the Electoral C nference or to the General Conference who shall be under twenty-five years of age, or who shall not have been a member of the Church in full connection for the five consecutive years preceding the elections.*

"¶ 59. The General Conference shall meet on the first day of May, in the year of our Lord 1812, in the city of New York, and thenceforward on the first day of May once in four years perpetually, in such place or places as shall be fixed on by the General Con'erence from time to time; but the general superintendents, or a majority of them, by and with the advice of two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences, shall have power to call an extra session of the General Conference at any time, to be constituted in the usual way. But if there shall be no general superintendent, then two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences shall have power to call such extra session.

"¶ 60. At all times when the General Conference is met it shall take two-thirds of the whole number of ministerial and lay delegates to form a quorum for transacting business.

"¶ 61. The ministerial and lay delegates shall deliberate and vote together as one body; but they shall vote separately whenever such separate vote shall be demanded by one-third of either order; and in such cases the concurrent vote of both orders shall be necessary to complete an action.

---

*The secretaries of the several Annual and Electoral Conferences shall send to the secretary of the last General Conference a certified copy of the election of delegates and reserves to the next General Conference, in the order of their election, as soon after the election as practicable, so that a roll of members and reserves may be prepared for the opening of the next General Conference.

"¶ 62. One of the general superintendents shall preside in the General Conference; but in case no general superintendent be present, the General Conference shall choose a president *pro tempore*.

"¶ 63. The General Conference shall have full power to make Rules and Regulations for our Church under the following limitations and restrictions, namely:

"§ 1. The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, nor change our Articles of Religion, nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.

"§ 2. The General Conference shall not allow of more than one ministerial representative for every fourteen members of an Annual Conference; nor of a less number than one for every forty-five; nor of more than two lay delegates for an Annual Conference: *Provided*, nevertheless, that when there shall be in any Annual Conference a fraction of two thirds the number which shall be fixed for the ratio of representation, such Annual Conference shall be entitled to an additional delegate for such fraction; and *provided*, also, that no Conference shall be denied the privilege of one ministerial and of one lay delegate.

"§ 3. The General Conference shall not change nor alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away episcopacy, nor destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency; but may appoint a missionary bishop or superintendent for any of our foreign missions, limiting his jurisdiction to the same respectively.

"§ 4. The General Conference shall not revoke nor change the General Rules of the United Societies.

"§ 5. The General Conference shall not do away the privileges of our ministers or preachers of trial by a committee, and of an appeal; neither shall they do away the privileges of our members of trial before the society or by a committee, and of an appeal.

"§ 6. The General Conference shall not appropriate the produce of the Book Concern, nor of the Chartered Fund, to any purpose other than for the benefit of traveling, supernumerary, superannuated, and worn-out preachers, their wives, widows, and children.

"¶ 64. *Provided*, nevertheless, that upon the concurrent recommendation of three-fourths of all the members of the several Annual Conferences, who shall be present and vote on such recommendation, then a majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above Restrictions, excepting the first article; and also, whenever such alteration or alterations shall have been first recommended by two-thirds of the General Conference, so soon as three-fourths of the members of all the Annual Conferences shall have concurred as aforesaid, such alteration or alterations shall take effect."

APPENDIX.

CHANGES IN THE SECTION ON THE GENERAL CONFERENCE FROM 1792 TO 1888.

THE following is a condensed showing of various changes made from time to time in this section. It is taken mainly from "The History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church," by the Rev. David Sherman, D. D.; but we have made modifications where there were manifest errors, or where greater clearness could be secured.

The figures on the left hand show the time when the part was inserted, those on the right show when the paragraphs were taken out, and the other dates show when smaller changes were made:

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

1792.] *Quest.* Who shall compose the General [1872. Conference, [in., 1808, and what are the regulations and powers belonging to it]?

Ans. All the Traveling Preachers who shall be in [1808. full connection at the time of holding the Conference [in., 1800, and have traveled four years], [in., 1804, from the time that they were received on trial by an Annual Conference].

1808.] ¶ 55. I.* The General Conference shall be composed [in., 1872, of Ministerial and Lay Delegates. The Ministerial Delegates shall consist] of one ["member," changed 1884, to "delegate"] for every [five; 1816, seven; 1836,

*The paragraph numbers are those of the Discipline of 1888. The Roman numerals appeared only in the Discipline of 1872. T. B. N.

twenty-one; 1856, twenty-seven; 1860, thirty; 1872, forty-five] members of each Annual Conference, to be appointed either by seniority or choice, at the discretion of such Annual Conference, yet so that such representatives shall have traveled at least four full calendar years from the time that they were received on trial by an Annual Conference, and are in full connection at the time of holding the Conference.*

1872.] ¶ 56. The Lay Delegates shall consist of two Laymen for each Annual Conference, except such Conferences as have but one Ministerial Delegate, which Conferences shall be entitled to one Lay Delegate each.

¶ 57. The Lay Delegates shall be chosen by an Electoral Conference of Laymen, which shall assemble for the purpose on the third day of the session of the Annual Conference, at the place of its meeting, at its session immediately preceding the General Conference.

¶ 58. The Electoral Conference shall be composed of one Layman from each Circuit or Station within the bounds of the Annual Conference; and, on assembling, the Electoral Conference shall organize by electing a Chairman and Secretary of their own number, such Laymen to be chosen by the last Quarterly Conference preceding the time of the assembling of such Electoral Conference; Provided, that no Layman shall be chosen a Delegate either to the Electoral Conference or to the General Conference who shall be under twenty-five years of age, or who shall not have been a member

---

1872.] * A transferred Preacher shall not be counted twice in the same year as the basis of the election of Delegates to the General Conference, nor vote for Delegates to the General Conference in any Annual Conference where he is not counted as a part of the basis of representation, nor vote twice the same year on any constitutional question.

of the Church in full connection for the five consecutive years preceding the elections.*

1792.] *Quest.* 3. When and where shall the next [1796. General Conference be held?

Ans. On the first day of November, in the year 1796, in the town of Baltimore.

1808.] ¶ 59. II. The General Conference shall meet on the first day of May, in the year of our Lord 1812, in the City of New York, and henceforward on the first day of May once in four years perpetually, in such place or places as shall be fixed on by the General Conference from time to time; but the General Superintendents [In., 1856, or a majority of them], ["with or by," changed 1856, to "by or with," 1884, to "by and with"] the advice of [In., 1856, two-thirds of] all the Annual Conferences, (or, if there be no General Superintendent, [In., 1856, two-thirds of] all the Annual Conferences (carried to foot of ¶ in 1884, and changed to read as below)) [respectively, om., 1856] shall have power to call ["a," changed, 1856, to "an;" In., 1856, extra session of the] General Conference, ["if they judge it necessary," om., 1856] at any time [In., 1856, to be constituted in the usual way.] [In., 1884 "or" changed to "But"] if there [In., 1884, shall] be no General Superintendent, [In., 1884, then] two-thirds of all the Annual Conferences shall have power to call [In., 1884. Such extra session.][1]

¶ 60. III. At all times when the General Conference is met it shall take two-thirds of ["the representatives

* The Secretaries of the several Annual and Electoral Conferences shall send to the Secretary of the last General Conference a certified copy of the election of Delegates and Reserves to the next General Conference, in the order of their election, as soon after the election as practicable, so that a roll of Members and Reserves may be prepared for the opening of the next General Conference.

[1] We have changed Dr. Sherman's arrangement of this paragraph considerably.—N.

of all the Annual Conferences to make," changed, 1872, to "the whole number of Ministerial and Lay Delegates to form"] a quorum for transacting business.

1872.] ¶ 61. IV. The Ministerial and Lay Delegates shall ["sit," 1884, to "vote"] and deliberate [1884, changed to deliberate and vote] together as one body, but they shall vote separately whenever such separate vote shall be demanded by one-third of either order; and in such cases the concurrent vote of both orders shall be necessary to complete an action.

1808.] ¶ 62. V. One of the General Superintendents shall preside in the General Conference; but in case no General Superintendent be present, the General Conference shall choose a president *pro tem.*

¶ 63. The General Conference shall have full powers to make rules and regulations for our Church, under the following limitations and restrictions, namely:

I. The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, ["or" 1884, to "nor"] change our Articles of Religion, nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.

II. ["They," 1884, to "The General Conference"] shall not allow of more than one [in., 1872, Ministerial] Representative for every [five; 1836, fourteen] members of the Annual Conference [in., 1872, nor more than two Lay Delegates for any Annual Conference]; nor allow of a less number than one for every ["seven; 1836, thirty; 1860, forty-five"].

1836.] Provided, nevertheless, that when there shall be in any Annual Conference a fraction of two-thirds the number which shall be fixed for the ratio of representation, such Annual Conference shall be entitled to an

additional delegate for such fraction; and provided, also, that no Conference shall be denied the privilege of ["two Delegates," changed, 1864, to "one Delegate"].

1808.] III. ["They," 1884, to "The General Conference"] shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away Episcopacy, or destroy the plan of our itinerant General Superintendency [in., 1856,* but may appoint a Missionary Bishop or Superintendent for any of our foreign missions, limiting his jurisdiction to the same respectively].

IV. ["They," 1884, to "The General Conference"] shall not revoke or change the General Rules of the United Societies.

V. ["They," 1884, to "The General Conference"] shall not do away the privileges of our Ministers or Preachers, of trial by a Committee, and of an appeal; neither shall they do away the privileges of our members, of trial before the Society, or by a Committee, and of an appeal.

VI. ["They," 1884, to "The General Conference"] shall not appropriate the produce of the Book Concern, ["or," 1828, to "nor"] of the [Charter, changed, 1884, to Chartered] Fund, to any purpose other than for the benefit of the traveling, supernumerary, superannuated, and worn-out preachers, their wives, widows, and children.

¶ 64. Provided, nevertheless, that upon the ["joint," changed, 1832, to "concurrent"] recommendation of ["all the," changed, 1832, to "three-fourths of the members of the several"] Annual Conferences [in., 1832, who shall be present and vote on such recommendation], then a

* By oversight of the Editor, this clause, though authorized by the General Conference of 1856, was not inserted in the Discipline until 1872.

majority of two-thirds of the General Conference succeeding shall suffice to alter any of the above restrictions [in., 1832, excepting the first article; and also, whenever such alteration or alterations shall have been first recommended by two-thirds of the General Conference, so soon as three-fourths of the members of all the Annual Conferences shall have concurred as aforesaid, such alteration or alterations shall take effect]. [1]

[1] Sherman, History of the Discipline, pp. 142-146.

OCT 30 1915

The End.

"A book that will live." + "It will be a standard work."

THE EVOLUTION OF EPISCOPACY

* AND *

ORGANIC METHODISM.

By REV. THOMAS B. NEELY, Ph.D., D.D., of Philadelphia,

AUTHOR OF "YOUNG WORKERS IN THE CHURCH," "CHURCH LYCEUM," "PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE," ETC.

12mo. Pp. 448. $1.25.

PUBLISHED BY

CRANSTON & STOWE, Cincinnati. HUNT & EATON, New York.

This book is a presentation of the fundamental principles of Church government, and at the same time is a history of Methodism in a new form.

PRESS NOTICES.

Dr. T. B. Neely is probably the ablest advocate of Methodism of recent days.—*The Church Unior*

The Rev. Dr. Neely has said the very best that can be said for the Methodist system of Church government. In his book, *The Evolution of Episcopacy*, he defines the theory or doctrine of the Methodist Episcopate.—*The Christian Union.*

It presents a clear and interesting account of the dawn of Methodism under John and Charles Wesley, and its introduction into the United States. All its points of difference from the Established Church are stated and justified with fairness.—*Literary News.*

This work presents not only the nature of the episcopate in the Methodist Episcopal Church, but also "the evolution of the later episcopacy from the simple forms of the early Christian Church, the modification of views in the Church of England after the Protestant Reformation, the change of Wesley's views in regard to Church government, the gradual evolution of organic Methodism, the growth of Methodism in America, the validity of Methodist ordinations, and the propriety and legitimacy of the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church as compared with the Protestant Episcopal and other Churches.—*Christian Advocate.*

This volume has been received with general favor by the Methodist press. . . . The chapter on Mr. Wesley's relation to the episcopate of American Methodism is full of interest, and some points are made which we do not remember to have seen in just the same form before.—*Michigan Christian Advocate.*

THE EVOLUTION OF EPISCOPACY.

This is a timely, popular, and valuable book on a distinctive feature of Methodist polity. It should be in the hands of all our preachers, and it is worthy of an extensive circulation throughout the Church. . . . Dr. Neely is well qualified to write such a book.—*Buffalo Christian Advocate.*

It is in its details a book for the Methodist denomination, relating to matters which concern the order and the ministry of those Churches exclusively. Indirectly it has a wider interest for all who love simplicity in the Church and hate the insidious advance of clericalism. . . . The question is one of great importance for its bearing on the freedom and usefulness of the Methodist body, and is handled in a particularly effective and thorough manner by Dr. Neely in this volume.—*The Independent.*

Dr. Neely's reputation as a writer on matters pertaining to Methodist history and economy will not suffer from this publication. It is a valuable contribution to our denominational literature, and well states and defends our historic doctrine concerning episcopacy. It is a repertory of facts worth knowing, and their knowledge will go far to check any tendency among us to undue claims either by or for our episcopacy.—*Baltimore Methodist.*

This is a critical, able, and timely book. Dr. Neely has obtained much credit for himself as an author, and conferred a great benefit upon the Church in writing this volume. It is the ablest and most important book that we have seen on this much-debated topic. It should be read by all our clergy; it will be studied by many of our thoughtful laymen. There are twelve chapters, taking the stretch of the whole question from "The Bishopric in the Early Christian Church," to the action of "the General Conference of 1884." We are personally grateful to Dr. Neely for his elaborate and profound volume. It is much needed.—*Zion's Herald, Boston.*

The title of this work is attractive, and one finds the interest sustained as he reads. It is a well-chosen title, for no other so well expresses just the purpose of the author. We can not improve upon the author's statement of this purpose. . . . The author faithfully carries out his object. The work shows care, research, and ability, and will be welcomed by ecclesiastical students in and out of the Methodist Church. . . . All will acknowledge that the author is fair and candid from his point of view. There are full and carefully selected citations that make the work valuable, and quite indispensable to the students of denominations.—*Public Opinion, 1889.*

A clear analytical explanation of the government, and especially of the episcopacy, in the Methodist Episcopal Church. . . . The author has at his command a rich store of General Conference acts, and quotations from the first writers of the Church, of which he makes careful and especially efficient use. In view of the brilliant illumination which he sheds upon the circumstance no one can longer doubt whether the High or Low Church theory has now the victory in the Methodist Episcopal Church. . . . The author explains all with the greatest clearness. He has made a valuable contribution to the ecclesiastico-legal literature of his Church. His book deserves the close study of preachers, particularly of such Churches as are governed by bishops or presbyters.—*Vierteljahrsschrift fur Wissenschaftliche und Practische Theologie, Cleveland, Ohio. 1889.*

This work bears the marks of careful study, protracted reflection, and clear perception. One of the most important qualifications in the preparation of a work on Church Government is the ability to comprehend the subject, so as to distribute the matter luminously and to avoid unnecessary repetition. This work makes obvious the possession, to a considerable degree, by the author, of this quality. While of special interest to Methodists it is full of valuable information for members of other denominations. It would be difficult to mention any branch of the subject which has not been treated with more or less fullness, and the

more important divisions exhaustively. . . . The serious question of the relation of Wesley to the American Episcopate is elaborately unfolded. Next comes the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This chapter is made peculiarly interesting by the full treatment of the views of Dr. (afterward Bishop) White, and the history of the formation of the Protestant Episcopal Church.—*Christian Advocate.*

Dr. Neely is one of the foremost men in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and any production from his pen is entitled to careful consideration. In the present instance we think he has succeeded in giving the Church a clear, consistent, and logical presentation of a subject about which there are confused, not to say nebulous, impressions in some quarters. . . . Our episcopacy, as Dr. Neely shows in his luminous and unanswerable argument, is simply a presbyterial episcopacy in which the order of presbyters is the permanent body, and the *episcopos* is the superintendent chosen to fulfill certain prescribed functions. Nothing is done by a bishop that may not be done by a presbyter in certain contingencies. Even the right to ordain is inherent in the presbytery, and it is delegated for good and sufficient reasons to the bishop. It may be exercised by the elders alone in the event of the death of all the bishops in the Church.—*Methodist Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1889.*

If there are any tendencies to prelacy in our Church this volume may operate as a prophylactic; if the prelatic spirit be actually working among either our ministers or people, this book may be regarded as an antidote. If there be no such tendencies, then it may serve the important purpose of confirming the conviction of our Church that its theory of episcopacy, as being not an *order*, but an *office*, has its justification in the simple practice of the primitive Church, in the ecclesiastical theories of the great Protestant Reformers, in the practice of our founder, and in the teachings of the men who framed our Church constitution. Dr. Neely has made this theory a demonstrated fact by citations gathered from many standard authorities, carefully collated, logically arranged, and judiciously commented upon. These citations, with their connecting historical statements, are gathered from many and varied sources. His discussion of the episcopate in our Church is full and satisfactory. It covers the substance of our Church history on episcopal questions, and contains much valuable matter not within the easy reach of most readers. It is therefore valuable both for reading and reference. To those seeking to understand our ecclesiasticism it is an especially desirable book.—*Dr. Wise, Editor pro tem. of Methodist Review.*

It is a volume not written for a particular occasion; it will have a permanent place in our Methodist literature. It is an investigation of a portion of our history that does not yet appear to be perfectly understood, and Dr. Neely's painstaking study will prove of great service to many persons who have not had access to documents somewhat rare, or time to study the subject. The first half or more of the volume, the first four chapters—"The Bishopric in the Early Christian Church," "Episcopacy in the Church of England," "Wesley's Views of Episcopacy, Ordination and Church Government," and "Wesley's Relation to the Episcopate of American Methodism," are in the best style; the matter is not so well presented elsewhere, so far as we know. The chapter on the "Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church" illustrates broadly the period, especially the ecclesiastical discussions of the times. And the following history, and the discussions over the episcopal office, are well summarized and give a clear and comprehensive view of the subject. Dr. Neely's position, that the bishopric is an office, not an order of the ministry, is that of the Methodist Episcopal Church. We commend the volume to our laymen. They and their children should master its contents.—*Central Christian Advocate, St. Louis.*

A restatement of the *doctrine* of the Church respecting episcopacy is opportune, both to enlighten the uninformed, to check the aggressive spirit of those in sympathy with an ecclesiastical hierarchy, and to settle once for all the position of the Church before the world on a subject that